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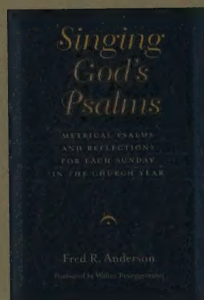
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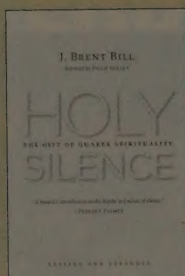
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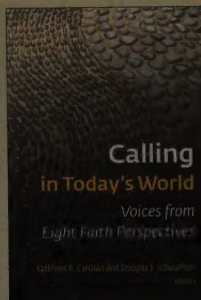
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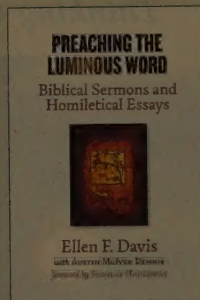
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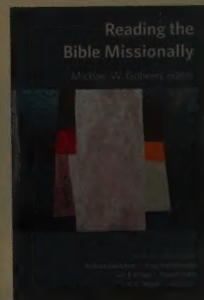
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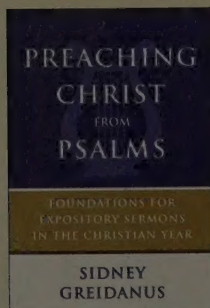


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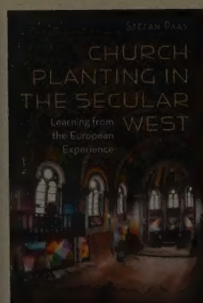
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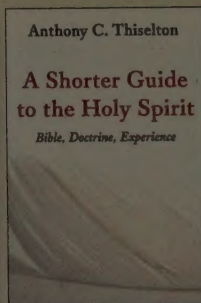
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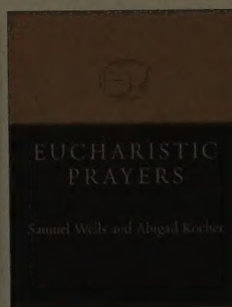
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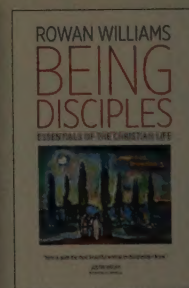


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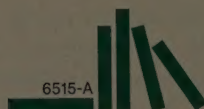
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From the publisher

Peter W. Marty

A child leads

Fifty-six years have passed since six-year-old Ruby Bridges walked into William Frantz Elementary School in New Orleans. Ruby was black; the other students were white. Her walk into that school, surrounded by federal marshals (later immortalized in Norman Rockwell's painting *The Problem We All Live With*), signaled a major development in desegregation. Before her first day of first grade had ended, parents had emptied the school of white children in a massive boycott. Ruby learned alone that year, taught by the one teacher willing to remain.

Huge crowds of protesters gathered daily outside the school to shout slurs and death threats at Ruby. Film clips from the day are hauntingly difficult to watch. Throngs of angry whites waved Confederate flags, and some even shoved before Ruby an open child's casket with a black doll inside. These expressions of public hatred remind us how unrestrained fear can quickly spiral into mob mentality.

When psychiatrist Robert Coles was studying children in the desegregating South in the '60s, he took a personal interest in Ruby. Her display of strength, stoicism, and bright cheer in the midst of a daily hell caught his attention and puzzled him. He began to meet with her every week.

One day Ruby's teacher told Coles that she had noticed Ruby moving her lips as she was walking into school. So Coles asked her, "Who were you talking to, Ruby?" "I was talking to God and praying for the people in the street,"

she said. "Why were you doing that, Ruby?" "Well, because I wanted to pray for them. Don't you think they need praying for?" Coles responded affirmatively but pushed further. "Where did you learn that?" "From my mommy and daddy and from the minister at church. I pray every morning [when I come to school] and every afternoon when I go home." Coles continued, "But Ruby, those people are so mean to you. You must have some other feelings besides just wanting to pray for them." "No," she said, "I just keep praying for them and hope God will be good to them. . . . I always pray the same thing. 'Please, dear God, forgive them, because they don't know what they're doing.'"

Two quick impressions arise from that little exchange. First, we notice the beautiful witness of a six-year-old girl with biblical truths embedded deep in her character. From parents who could neither read nor write, Ruby absorbed scripture that the family had memorized in church and exercised at home. She discovered through her parents' poverty and humility how to put those truths into practice. I wonder how many of us with fancy degrees and affluent households come close to an equivalent life so thoroughly grounded in God.

Second, her choice of prayer language points to love being at the heart of forgiveness. Jesus' remarkable words from the cross constitute pure love doled out to people who had insulted him and become enmeshed in fear of each other. Perhaps this Holy Week we ought to pray those Jesus words ourselves, speaking them with the confident spirit of Ruby Bridges: "Please, dear God, forgive us, because we often don't know what we're doing."

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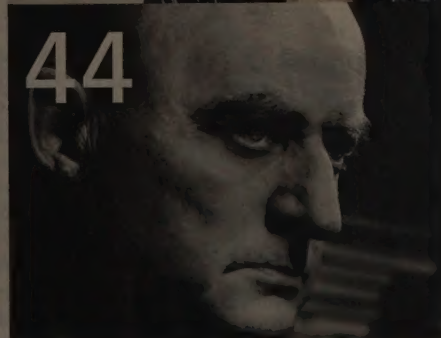
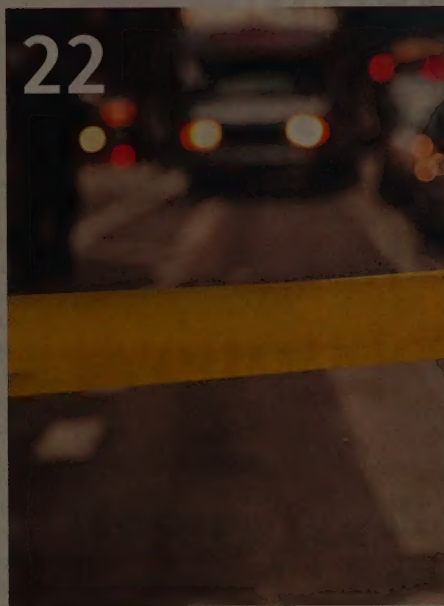
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LETTERS

What civil religion?

How President Trump's speech impacted America's long-standing "civil religion" (mythology) is beyond me, and in fact no example was given in the editorial "Requiem for civil religion" (March 1).

As president, Trump promotes America and American values. His inauguration address was inspiring to me, a Christian libertarian. Unlike the former president, Trump is obviously proud of what America can and should offer to the world. Yet he is not going to make the mistake of the past several administrations and force democracy on the planet as a rationale for exploitation and extraction of resources.

Mark Woodworth
christiancentury.org comment

Becoming America . . .

I enjoyed Philip Gorski's discussion about the kind of freedom a republic can promise ("Becoming America," March 1). It was a comprehensive approach to the problems we face. But I wish two further points were more adequately addressed.

First, adequate funding of public education should be attended to by the individual states. And second, somehow we must find leaders with courage and vision to see beyond what is to what can be by accomplishing what Gorski proposes. There are so many things that a person with vision can express to lead our citizenry to think beyond the end of their noses.

Proper public funding and a visionary leader will overcome the obstacles of a selfish populace.

Robert Turk
Fort Worth, Tex.

Rules for retiring . . .

In the letters about expectations of pastoral retirement (March 1), Peter Goguts expressed concern that denominational models appear to dehumanize retiring pastors. He asks, "What other organization behaves this way?"

On the surface, I see his points. But I must ask the question from the other angle. What organization allows retired staff to meddle in current leadership vision and decisions and continue to execute managerial authority through side channels?

Unfortunately, this has happened too often with retired clergy. Too many ordained folks are unable to respect the limits of their call and office. The rules are there because they need to be.

Andrew Weaver
Sunbury, Pa.

Sheep and goats . . .

My discouragement reached a new low when, in the March 1 CenturyMarks pages, I saw the quote by Franklin Graham: "It's not a biblical command for the country to let everyone in who wants to come, that's not a biblical issue."

In response, I can only say what Jesus said: "Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not take me in, I was naked and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not visit me" (Matt. 25:41-43).

Lloyd Condra
Woodinville, Wash.

When hatred rises

March 29, 2017

On one day last month, Jewish schools and community centers in 11 states were targeted with bomb threats. The threats came after Jewish cemeteries were extensively vandalized in St. Louis and Philadelphia. Meanwhile, four mosques were burned during January and February, three of them known to be acts of arson—an unprecedented sequence of attacks on mosques, according to the Southern Poverty Law Center. Also in February, two Indian engineers were attacked in a bar in Olathe, Kansas, by a man who shouted racial slurs. One of the engineers was killed. The perpetrator reportedly believed the men to be Iranian.

Since the presidential election, the SPLC has seen an upswing in this kind of hate-filled activity. It counted 1,094 “bias incidents” in the first 34 days after the election.

When acts of racial, religious, or ethnic hatred take place, Americans instinctively look to national leaders to respond. Presidents typically offer statements that condemn prejudice and speak to the wounds that hate-filled acts inflict. The current president’s reluctance to offer even brief words of condemnation until pushed to do so has created a moral vacuum and encouraged an atmosphere in which contempt for the other is permissible.

When moral leadership is absent at the national level, it is all the more needed from local civic and religious leaders. On that score, many responses to recent incidents have been heartening.

Muslim activists raised more than \$150,000 to repair headstones damaged at the Jewish cemetery in St. Louis. Christians and Muslims worked to repair the Jewish cemetery in Philadelphia. After a mosque was razed in Texas, a synagogue and two churches offered to let Muslim worshipers use their buildings. (See news story on p. 12.)

Throughout the country, Jews and Muslims have joined forces to resist the movement toward intolerance. In a dramatic statement late last year, Jonathan Greenblatt, head of the Anti-Defamation League, a Jewish group, stated that if Muslims were forced to register with the United States government, he would register as a Muslim too.

Rabbi Andrea Goldstein at Congregation Shaare Emeth in St. Louis says that moral leadership in her community has come from faith leaders who were able to deplore acts of hate but remain calm and recognize that much remains unknown about some crimes.

“Helping a community to remain calm and remind them that, while deplorable, the vandalism was a destruction of property, not lives, has been incredibly important,” she said. She has been inspired by the leadership of people like Faizan Sayed, a Muslim leader in St. Louis, who responded to attacks on Muslims and Jews by reminding his community of the teachings of the faith.

After the shootings in Olathe, a diverse group of mourners gathered at the First Baptist Church there to support one another and to hold up a vision of community in which people of different races, nationalities, and religions live together in peace and mutual respect. Holding up that vision is an urgent calling for everyone.

While a president hedges, faith leaders offer moral leadership.

CENTURY marks

PARADE OF HONOR: When a person dies in a nursing care facility, the body is often wheeled out discreetly, and residents' doors are closed so that they won't see the event. But at Luther Acres in Lititz, Pennsylvania, staff members line the hallways as the dead are wheeled past. Family members of the deceased and other residents, and even the house dog, participate in the ritual. Staff remain quiet during the procession. Even undertakers find themselves moved by the brief ritual (LancasterOnline, March 2).

FIX IT: To combat a throwaway consumer culture, Sweden is giving financial incentives for people to repair clothes, bicycles, appliances, and other goods. In addition to providing tax incentives for repairs, levies are being added to the manufacture of new appliances based on the amount of chemicals used. More people paying for repairs should mean more people in the labor

force and more local jobs (World Economic Forum, October 27, 2016).

GIVE TO THOSE WHO ASK: Pope Francis said people should always give money to homeless people without regard for what they might do with it. It's OK if the money is used to buy a glass of wine, the pope said—that may be the only happiness a homeless person has. "One can look at a homeless person and see him as a person or else as if he were a dog, and they notice this different way of looking," the pope said (Catholic News Service, February 28).

NO PLACE LIKE HOME: Religious leaders in Los Angeles are preparing a network of refuge for those in danger of being deported by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement. Called the Rapid Response Team, the group's goal is to provide undocumented persons with sanctuary options other than churches and religious schools. The religious lead-

ers in this network doubt that a 2011 Homeland Security ruling protecting houses of worship and schools against intrusion will be retained by the current administration (CNN, February 26).

ELECTION RESULTS: In the Trump era, people seem hungrier for factual reporting: subscriptions are up significantly at the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, and the *Wall Street Journal*, and the number of NPR listeners reached new height during and after the election. Humor is also a beneficiary: *Saturday Night Live* has received some of its best ratings in 25 years, and Stephen Colbert's *Late Show* viewership has taken off since the election. Although the evidence is mostly anecdotal, there also seems to be a new interest in spirituality. "Many people are looking for larger meaning in their lives—or at least a psychological shelter from the storm," says *New York Times* columnist Timothy Egan (March 3).

REPORT CARD: Voucher programs ostensibly allow students to escape underperforming public schools and motivate public schools to do a better job. Several recent studies, however, suggest that this doesn't happen. A researcher at the University of Notre Dame discovered that Indiana students who have transferred to private schools showed a decline in mathematics achievement and no increase in English proficiency. Declining achievement was also evident in voucher programs in Louisiana and Ohio. Fordham Institute, a charter school advocacy group in Ohio, admitted that the negative trend persists over time (*Los Angeles Times*, February 28).

BLESSED BE THE TIES: Humans are able to bond socially with a larger number of people—more than the size of their



"Please, Daddy, just one more conspiracy theory."

brain would suggest is possible—when compared to other species. Robin Dunbar has proved that each human being is capable of a consistent number of social ties. He and his colleagues have also demonstrated that laughter and singing expand the capacity for social bonding. He wants to test the hypothesis that religion is the other component in expanding our social connections. “These three things are very good at triggering endorphins, making us feel bonded,” Dunbar said (*Washington Post*, February 27).

CHRIST AGAINST CULTURE: In his latest book, *The Benedict Option*, conservative commentator Rod Dreher calls conservative Christians to a strategic withdrawal from public life. Conceding the culture wars to progressives, especially on issues of same-sex relations, he recommends that conservative Christians regard themselves as a subculture. “Rather than wasting energy and resources fighting unwinnable political battles, we should instead work on building communities, institutions, and networks of resistance that can outwit, outlast, and eventually overcome the occupation” (*Atlantic*, February 22).

PASTOR’S STUDY: Stanley Hauerwas urges ministers to continue to read and study, even though there may be little reward for it in ministry. They have to convince their congregations to support their study and understand it is for the good of the congregation. “So it is my hope that when ministers are asked about their day they might say, ‘Well I was reading Karl Barth on the Trinity and I think I finally understand why ‘Father’ is in the first article of the Creed,’” Hauerwas said (*ABC Religion and Ethics*, February 22).

COAL REVIVAL? Coal miners earn a salary of between \$40,000 and 60,000—not a bad wage for rural West Virginia, if you can find such a job. Close to 11,000 coal miners have been laid off in West Virginia alone since 2013. Natural gas has become plentiful and cheaper than coal. According to a Goldman Sachs report, the falling demand for coal is irreversible. One option to address the growing poverty in West Virginia is to

“Our concern is that the contentious and confrontational political and social rhetoric that Mr. Graham has used has the potential to overshadow the message of Jesus and incite hostility in our highly charged social climate.”

— Letter signed by more than 30 prominent evangelical, mainline Protestant, and Roman Catholic leaders in Vancouver, British Columbia, protesting a rally to be held in their city by evangelist Franklin Graham [*Vancouver Sun*, February 25]

“Forget the wall. Build a deck. Invite everyone over.”

— Sign at a Milwaukie, Oregon, lumber company [*Willamette Week*, February 27]

harvest lumber, a renewable resource (*Global Sisters Report*, March 2).

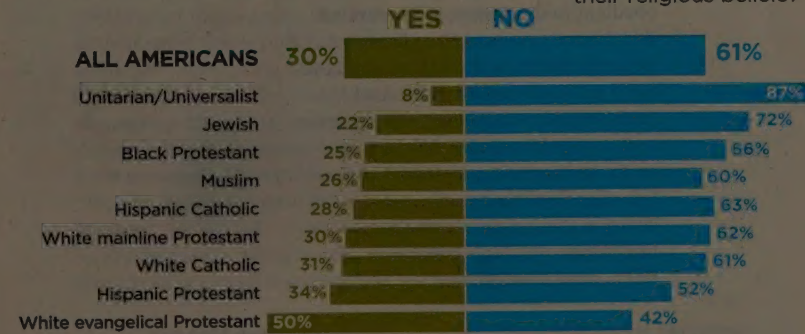
THWARTED REFORMATION: It’s not true that Islam has never had something comparable to the Protestant Reformation or the Enlightenment, says Christopher de Bellaigue, author of *The Islamic Enlightenment*. Nineteenth-century Islam had a creative engagement with modernity in three countries—Turkey, Egypt, and Iran. Change came quickly after the Napoleonic invasion of Egypt in 1798. The telegraph and postal service made it possible to engage the larger world. Crowned leaders were encouraged to share their power with the people. There was a rise in religious skepticism and liberalization of the role of women. This modernization process lasted until World War I, when Allied powers forced Muslims into political submission (*Spectator*, February 25).

HOLY RUCKUS: Liba, an Orthodox Jewish organization in Jerusalem, based in between 1,000 and 2,000 Orthodox high school girls to prevent a Jewish feminist group from praying at the Western Wall. The school girls were instructed to fill up the women’s section so the feminist group, Women of the Wall, could not perform its monthly prayer last month. Although most of the teens prayed quietly, some blew whistles and yelled at the feminist Jews, who were forced to pray in a corner of the women’s section, behind police barricades. Members of the Women of the Wall group are Reform, Conservative, and Orthodox Jews. Despite the commotion, a twelve-year-old girl celebrating her bat mitzvah successfully read from the Torah, surrounded by 200 Women of the Wall supporters and her family (RNS).

SERVICE DENIED?

SOURCE: PRRI

Should small business owners be able to refuse to provide products or services to gays and lesbians if it violates their religious beliefs?



Journalist Marina Cantacuzino

What is forgiveness?

IN 2004 Marina Cantacuzino founded an organization called The Forgiveness Project. It began with an exhibit called The F Word, created with photographer Brian Moody, which joined photos and stories of reconciliation and forgiveness. The exhibit has been displayed in 14 countries. The Forgiveness Project runs a prison program in England and Wales called RESTORE. Cantacuzino is also the author of The Forgiveness Project: Stories for a Vengeful Age.

How did you become interested in forgiveness?

It began with my anger at the Iraq

war: anger at the rush to war; anger at the dominant narrative of retaliation; anger at the black-and-white thinking that says “if you’re not with us, you are against us.” I was fascinated by the notion that forgiveness might be a way of putting things right between conflicting individuals or groups, and I was interested in forgiveness as a pain management strategy, a means of self-healing and renewal. I became determined to collect stories that showed peaceful solutions to conflict, stories where victims had met their offenders, where people had forgiven the killer of a loved one, or where for-

mer perpetrators had transformed their aggression into a force for peace.

I thought about asking you to define forgiveness, but you make it clear in *The Forgiveness Project* that you resist defining the word. Why is that?

Forgiveness has multiple meanings, and people don’t agree on the meaning. Even my own current working definition—“making peace with something/someone you cannot change”—doesn’t quite cut it, because forgiveness is more than acceptance or letting go. It has to include an element of compassion or empathy. As an organization, The Forgiveness Project is well served to be unspecific about the meaning. I have had people insist that forgiveness must be unconditional and therefore an act of self-healing. I’ve also had people insist the exact opposite, that forgiveness is entirely dependent on remorse and apology, and that therefore it has to be earned and deserved.

You also resist calling forgiveness “good.”

When I first started collecting stories for the F Word exhibition in 2003, I imagined forgiveness as a place where everything was transformed and healed. Along the way, however, I met Alistair Little, a former Protestant paramilitary soldier from Northern Ireland who had killed a man from the opposing side and served many years in prison for his crime. He told me categorically that he did not want to be involved in anything that pushed forgiveness as the only way or best way to heal. He said, “Some people can’t forgive. But that doesn’t mean

Corpus

When God is silent late at night,
and I’m watching the shadows
the moon makes against the walls,
I wish sometimes for certainty,
to know God like the fetal pig
I dissected in high school,
its legs tied back with twine
on an aluminum tray, flesh
obedient to the scalpel as I separated
skin from meat, meat from bone,
living silence from the silence of death.
But I lie awake and listen instead
to the wind-rustled leaves of the poplar,
to the quiet breaths my wife makes
as she lies here sleeping, and
I pray, or think to myself,
which in these moments feels
like prayer, *oh, this is enough,*
this is more than enough.

Donovan McAbee

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they're weak, or that they'll be consumed by bitterness or anger. I've met people who haven't been able to forgive, but who haven't allowed the event to paralyze them. As human beings they've been hurt beyond repair. Who are we to say they should forgive?"

The word *should* affected me. I thought to myself, I never want people to feel they have failed if they cannot forgive. I agree with the late Marshall Rosenberg, founder of the Center for Nonviolent Communication, who believed *should* was one of the most violent words in the English language. In the wrong hands, forgiveness can become a kind of tyranny.

So you advocate a path of forgiveness, even while recognizing its limitations and potential divisiveness?

I don't advocate a path of forgiveness so much as an openness and a willingness to explore it—and then accept or reject it. I think people often don't want to think about forgiving someone or themselves, or about asking for forgiveness, because they have so many misconceptions about what it means. The Forgiveness Project is fundamentally a place of inquiry. We tell other people's stories. Some of them will be strong advocates of forgiveness, while others will focus on the limitations.

What do you mean by the need to free forgiveness from "the straitjacket of religion"?

I mean that sometimes forgiveness is barnacled by eons of piety. There is this perception that you need to be morally or spiritually superior in order to forgive.

How else is the concept of forgiveness misused?

I find it dangerous to be too prescriptive about forgiveness. For instance, I read an opinion piece in which the author said the physical effects of being unable to forgive can lead to cancer. There is plenty of evidence to show that forgiveness is good for your health and may even extend your life span, but there is no causal link between nonforgiveness and cancer.

Archbishop Desmond Tutu draws a distinction between forgiveness and rec-

onciliation. He advises us either to renew or release a relationship that is harming us. In other words, forgiveness does not mean reconciliation.

I am also concerned about forgiveness being promoted as a quick fix. Rowan Williams said: "I think the 20th century saw such a level of atrocity that it has focused our minds very, very hard on the dangers of forgiving too easily . . . because if forgiveness is easy, it is as if the suffering doesn't really matter."

What do you aim to accomplish through the prison program RESTORE?

RESTORE is a three-day, intensive, group-based process involving both a victim or a survivor of crime and an offender who by working together model a restorative process. Restorative justice is about humanizing crime. It views crime as injury rather than as law-breaking, and justice as healing rather than as punishment. The leading restorative justice theorist, John Braithwaite, has written: "Because crime hurts, justice should heal." Pure restorative jus-

tice (the face-to-face meeting between an offender and the victim) can only happen when the offender accepts that he or she has committed an offense and is willing to show remorse.

The RESTORE program supports offenders in developing emotional resilience, demonstrating that everyone has the ability to change; and participants learn to create a new narrative from a basis of hope, responsibility, and a sense of agency.

How can we respond to the nationalistic mood evident around the globe and to the increase in hate crimes?

The only thing I know of—and the most powerful, and the quickest and the simplest response—is to share humanizing stories. This sharing of human stories creates what you might describe as a virtuous cycle and is therefore a powerful antidote to the vicious cycle of revenge and retaliation. As the poet Ben Okri wrote, "Stories can conquer fear, you know. They can make the heart bigger." CC

—Amy Frykholm

Tocsin

"a warning; an omen . . ."
(*American Heritage Dictionary*)

Here on Maine's rocky coast we should not be too surprised to hear the occasional shrill melody, a sandpiper, perhaps, or endangered piping plover, sounding the alarm from Higgins Beach just down the shore. But recent evenings we are being serenaded—late but lusty—by this year's crop of peeper frogs, piping their insistent, eerie clamor from the reeds that cluster round our catchment pond, there by the dog run. "Singing for their supper, like as not," I reassure myself, as their steep voices punctuate my final dog walk of the day; although—more likely—singing for something a tad closer to this fast approaching bed-time, bedding-down-time, clambering-upon-time, time for frogs to do their clinging, slippery, slithery thing that leads to further frogs; a not inconsequential process for this lately threatened species. "We piped to you . . . you did not dance," the holy man said long ago, "we wailed . . . you did not weep." So are they also wailing over there tonight, and is anyone, apart from my small dog, panicked by their urgent, haunting cries?

J. Barrie Shepherd

Interfaith support rises along with attacks

When Adam Zeff, rabbi of the Germantown Jewish Centre in Philadelphia, a short distance from Mount Carmel Cemetery, heard that vandals had desecrated the place where several families in his congregation had loved ones buried, he felt compelled to go see.

"These gravestones weigh hundreds of pounds, and some were even reinforced with iron bars connecting them to their bases," he wrote in a commentary. "Bringing them down to the ground required great force and determination."

Zeff was not the only one who went that day to Mount Carmel, one of the oldest Jewish cemeteries in Philadelphia.

"Some of them were Jews, some were Christians, and some were Muslims," he wrote. "No one organized them to come, and they had no clear plan."

The group of strangers worked together to lift all of the stones they could and replace them on their bases.

Zeff wrote: "The shock, the grief, the worry, and the fear that Jews in Philadelphia and religious and ethnic minorities across America are feeling are real. And the good people of all faiths and races who surround us, who partner with us to push back the darkness with their light—they, too, are real. Neither cancels out the other."

Zeff's story of concrete interfaith outreach after an attack was one of many in recent months even as other alarming incidents continued. More than a dozen headstones were knocked over and photos defaced in a Jewish cemetery in Rochester, New York, in early March.

A week earlier, after vandals damaged headstones in a centuries-old Missouri Jewish cemetery, Muslim activists raised more than \$150,000 to fund repairs. And when arsonists destroyed the Victoria

Islamic Center in Texas, among those offering space for Muslim prayers were a synagogue, a Lutheran church, and an Episcopal church.

In another instance, after the Islamic Society of New Tampa, Florida, was burned by an arsonist, Adeel Karim noticed something unusual about donations made to a repair fund he launched: the donations were in multiples of \$18: \$36, \$72, \$90, and more, which initially confused him.

"Then I figured [it] out after clicking on the names Avi, Cohen, Goldstein, Rubin, Fisher," Karim wrote on social media. "Jews donate in multiples of 18 as

a form of what is called 'Chai.' It wishes the recipient a long life."

Since January 9, more than 100 bomb threats have been called in to Jewish community centers, day schools, and other institutions in dozens of states. In no case have explosives been found, but the threats have prompted evacuations. On March 3, the FBI announced the arrest of a man in St. Louis on charges of stalking a woman and making bomb threats in her name to Jewish community centers and other organizations.

Two senators, a Democrat and a Republican, introduced a bill that would allot an additional \$20 million to improve security at faith-based community centers—whether they are Jewish or affiliated with another faith—through an existing Department of Homeland Security program. The funds are not designated for synagogues, mosques, or churches, though attacks against houses of worship and religiously affiliated cemeteries have spiked in recent months. Several mosques have burned, and a bullet was fired through a Hebrew school classroom window in a synagogue in Evansville, Indiana. The Faith-Based Community Center Protection Act would also double the penalty for making a false bomb threat, from five to ten years in prison.

"This legislation would help ensure that community centers like the JCCs have the added protection they need and can focus on serving the community, while the FBI and our Justice Department track down those responsible," according to a statement from Sen. Martin Heinrich (D., N. Mex.), who filed the legislation February 27 with Sen. Dean Heller (R., Nev.).

President Trump, long criticized for failing to address a surge in hate crimes,



PHOTO COURTESY OF RABBI ADAM ZEFF

RIGHTING A WRONG: People from different backgrounds work together to lift desecrated tombstones at Mount Carmel Cemetery in Philadelphia on February 26, one of many acts of interfaith solidarity in the midst of incidents of vandalism, arson, and other crimes targeting minority religious groups.

began his first address to Congress on February 28 by invoking Black History Month and condemning threats against Jewish institutions and the shooting of Indian men in Kansas City.

His soft-toned speech at points emphasized the commonalities among religious groups and declared that “we are all made by the same God.” And he acknowledged “our Muslim allies” fighting the militants known as the Islamic State. He called them “a network of lawless savages that have slaughtered Muslims and Christians, and men, women, and children of all faiths and beliefs.”

He also defended his January 27 executive order, currently stayed by a federal appeals court, that temporarily bans nationals of seven Muslim-majority nations from visiting the United States. And he promised to fight “radical Islamic terrorism,” enunciating the words to make the point that he would use the phrase, despite even his own national security adviser’s stated belief that it helps extremists to paint the United States as anti-Muslim.

Statistics on hate-related incidents in recent months are hard to come by, though there did appear to be a spike following Trump’s election. The FBI tracks such crimes, but the latest data are from 2015.

More apparent is the rise in the number of hate groups. According to the Southern Poverty Law Center, a nonprofit that tracks hate groups and extremists, there were 917 such groups nationwide in 2016, up from 784 in 2014 but still shy of the all-time peak in 2011 of 1,018. The number of anti-Muslim hate groups nearly tripled between 2015 and 2016.

The SPLC attributes the increasing number of such groups, in part, “to a presidential campaign that flirted heavily with extremist ideas.”

These groups “see Trump as someone giving them hope that the state will act on their interests,” said Carolyn Gallaher, a political geographer at American University in Washington and author of *On the Fault Line: Race, Class and the American Patriot Movement*. “Will it only get bigger as they feel they now have a conduit to the White House? Or do people say, ‘Now we can just do it on our own, say what we want to say, and enjoy

protections for it’? . . . It will depend in large part on what the administration’s posture is going forward.” — the CHRISTIAN CENTURY staff; Kimberly Winston and Lauren Markoe, Religion News Service; Jason Thomson, *The Christian Science Monitor*

Episcopal Divinity School to affiliate with Union Theological in New York

Episcopal Divinity School is planning to move to New York City.

Its leaders are negotiating an affiliation with Union Theological Seminary after EDS ceases granting degrees at its Cambridge, Massachusetts, campus at the end of this academic year.

“The board adopted several principles when we went into this process two years ago: to maintain the mission of EDS, to be financially sustainable, and [to make] no small-to-small merger,” said Gary Hall, an EDS graduate and current chair of the board of trustees. “We wanted whatever we did to take our resources and align them with a place that was robust and sustainable.”

EDS has more than \$50 million in its endowment and more than \$20 million worth of property, according to Hall. But the school was losing \$8 million a year and had only 40 students total. By ending operations before burning through more of the money, the school will be able to give more generous severance terms to the faculty and staff, Hall said.

In less than a decade, 11 theological schools that were previously independent have merged with larger schools but continue granting degrees, according to Daniel Aleshire, executive director of the Association of Theological Schools. Finances were the primary issue in most cases, though sometimes the financial challenges involved the religious body backing the institution rather than the school itself. Aleshire noted that EDS’s plan resembles the move of Andover Newton Theological School to Yale Divinity School in that EDS will not continue granting degrees.

EDS students will get a degree from

Union, paralleling the arrangement that Berkeley Divinity School, an Episcopal seminary, has with Yale, and EDS will offer Anglican studies instruction for Union students much as Berkeley does for Yale.

EDS is still determining how many faculty and staff it will retain but is certain it will continue in its mission.

“One of the reasons for choosing Union was the long history on both sides of social-justice orientation,” Hall said. “We want to use some of our resources for social-justice advocacy in the church and in the world.”

Union is already working with Trinity Church Wall Street, a large, well-endowed Episcopal congregation. Together the three institutions are poised to get involved in policy conversations nationally and internationally with an Anglican perspective.

Serene Jones, president of Union, saw an alignment between the culture and vision of the schools.

“The most important factor in our moving to the point where we’re having these conversations is a really profound and deeply theological sense of our shared mission,” she said. “This isn’t a partnership that [is] springing from a sense of mutual benefit in terms of infrastructure; it’s a deep sense of calling.”

Jones recalled that when she and other leaders presented the possibility of partnering with EDS, all of the school’s constituencies “were thrilled.”

Union has experienced some conflict among its constituencies in the past 18 months over its plans to sell development rights to raise \$100 million for legally required repairs on its campus. The construction that will take place on Union’s Upper Manhattan campus will include space for Union’s educational purposes, including dormitories, faculty residences, classrooms, and offices, but the rest will be private housing—the source of the objections from some students, alumni, and faculty, primarily because the housing will not be affordable for lower-income people.

Though not able to satisfy all critics, Union moved forward with the plan and was working on finalizing it in early March. Jones noted that enrollment is increasing, and Union’s operating budget has been healthy for the past decade.

That was a key part of what EDS was

looking for when considering partners. The board determined it would not consider a merger with another seminary of its size, which ruled out the nine other Episcopal seminaries, including General Theological Seminary in New York City.

The concern with partnering with small schools was that EDS would expend its endowment, Hall said, “and find ourselves in a new situation with financial challenges.”

After deciding to close, the board initially considered establishing a center for Abrahamic studies or funding local unaccredited Episcopal theological education programs. But the board didn’t see those options as “true to the intention of the donors,” Hall said. “We decided that people gave the money largely for accredited, degree-granting theological education.”

Gay Clark Jennings, president of the Episcopal Church’s House of Deputies and also an EDS grad, sees the school as carrying on its mission in a way that’s sustainable.

“I’m really proud of my alma mater for saying, ‘We’re not going to remain stagnant,’” she said.

She noted that 50 years ago a report came out on the state of Episcopal theological education called *Ministry for Tomorrow*, which included the recommendations that seminaries be bold in responding to change, and particularly to look at ways to combine. A few years after that report, EDS was formed through a merger of the Philadelphia Divinity School and the Episcopal Theological School of Cambridge.

Jennings noted the diverse contexts of Episcopal ministry, not only in the United States but in more than a dozen countries such as Ecuador, Taiwan, and Switzerland.

“I think there’s room for different seminaries with different approaches, even in New York City, which is a big place,” she said, noting that EDS was part of a consortium in Massachusetts with Andover-Newton and Harvard Divinity School. There may be opportunities along those lines in New York, including with General Theological Seminary, she said. “It enriches our various churches if we have that kind of collaboration and opportunities to learn from one another.” —Celeste Kennel-Shank, the CHRISTIAN CENTURY

State museum or church? Russians debate future of iconic cathedral

The golden-domed St. Isaac’s Cathedral—the fourth largest church in the world—dominates the skyline of historic St. Petersburg. It has been a state museum for 80-plus years, is a UNESCO heritage site, and receives 4 million paying visitors per year.

Isaaki, as locals call it, is also at the center of the most passionate political conflict this city has seen in years, after Gov. Georgy Poltavchenko unexpectedly announced recently that the huge cathedral is to be transferred to the Russian Orthodox Church before the year is out.

That triggered a wave of public controversy, with about 8,000 St. Petersburgers coming out one Sunday to hold hands in rings around the enormous cathedral and to engage every weekend in dueling demonstrations with supporters of the handover. An online petition opposing the move has since garnered more than 200,000 signatures, and the heads of major Russian museums such as the Kremlin and the Hermitage have publicly begged the church to calm public unease by withdrawing the request for its return.

The controversy is the highest-profile example to date of the ongoing campaign by the Russian Orthodox Church to regain religious properties seized by the Bolsheviks after the Russian Revolution. Church authorities argue that it is a matter of historical justice, but others see it as a power grab that overlooks public interests.

“The handover of St. Isaac’s Cathedral in St. Petersburg comes in a year that marks the centennial of the Russian Revolution, so it may become a symbol of national reconciliation,” Patriarch Kirill said in mid-February in his first public comment on the subject. “In the past, the destruction of churches and mass killings of believers carved out a horrible chapter in the book of our history and indicated a division in the nation. But now, the peaceful atmosphere surrounding the churches returned to the

believers should become a symbol of accord and mutual forgiveness.”

The director of St. Isaac’s Museum, Nikolai Burov, said he thought the issue had been satisfactorily resolved in 1990, when a deal allowed for regular services to be held in a side chapel of the cavernous cathedral. There are now about two such services daily, usually attended by fewer than 30 people, apart from the much-larger flow of paying tourists. On major holidays, services have higher attendance.

“Until now, this arrangement has worked very well,” Burov said. “We have good relations with the local parish. Entry for worshipers and pilgrims is, of course, free. And the museum takes care of all the expenses.”

But Vitaly Milonov, a conservative member of the State Duma, sees that setup as demeaning to the church.

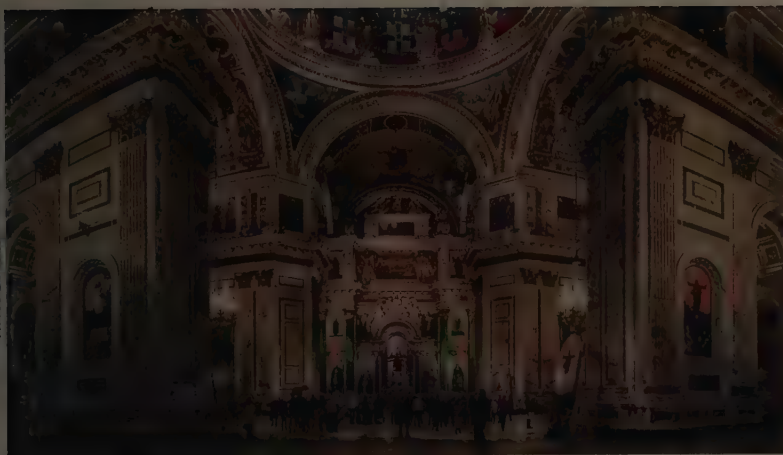
“St. Isaac’s is a museum with the possibility to hold occasional services,” Milonov said. “That cannot suit Christians, who are compelled to witness one of Russia’s main cathedrals reduced to a trade center, a big souvenir shop, where priests are part of the show.”

Critics include political activists who say the abrupt decision, made without any public consultation, must be opposed as a basic matter of civil rights. They complain that the church, which increasingly uses its influence to promote socially conservative causes such as anti-LGBT legislation or to rail against the modern status of women, is conspiring with political authorities to take over publicly loved symbols like St. Isaac’s without obtaining any kind of democratic consent.

Local tour operators fear church management will deter visitors by enforcing dress codes. They are also concerned that photography will be curbed and secular content may be removed from the lectures given by guides. Some 400 museum workers worry about losing their jobs.

Andrei Pivovarov, an activist of the liberal Parnas party, argues that Isaaki is being traded to the church for political favors at the expense of public interests. He suggested looking to the wider area around the church.

“In the Leningrad region there are a huge number of ruined churches and



SACRED SPACE, HISTORICAL SPACE: St. Isaac's Cathedral in St. Petersburg, known for its golden dome, is the fourth-largest church in the world. (The interior is shown here with a panorama of multiple photos.) It has been a state museum for eight decades. Plans to turn it over to the Russian Orthodox Church have sparked protests.

monasteries that cry out for restoration," he said. "The church shows little interest in taking those projects on. They want famous objects that have already been restored by the state."

An even bigger issue is the church's insistence that entry fees will be abolished, since a house of worship must be open to all. For many years, the 250 ruble admission (\$4.30) paid by tourists has funded not only the cathedral's upkeep but also the restoration of several other local churches. Now, while management and daily costs will pass to the church, formal ownership of the vast building and the ongoing restoration expenses will remain a public burden. And there is concern about the church's ability to maintain St. Isaac's magnificent interior as effectively as state museum workers have.

The process of returning properties from state to church usage has been under way for some time, as the Kremlin seeks the political support of religious authorities and the church looks to regain its czarist-era prestige. Several famous sites around St. Petersburg have been handed back in recent years without even a murmur from the public. Around Moscow, about two dozen historic monasteries have been returned as well as the famous Novodevichy Convent. Similar battles between the church and museum workers around the

country have ended with the transfer of museums back to religious use.

"This is a mark of respect to our ancestors, who built St. Isaac's to be a house of God," said Natalya Rodomanova, communications director for the St. Petersburg church authority. "You have to remember, in St. Petersburg before the Revolution there were 500 churches and monasteries for a population of just 2 million people. Today there are just 200 churches, for over 5 million people. So how can people say the church already has enough?"

It's more complicated than that, critics say. All the churches in Russia were effectively state property for more than 300 years, since Peter the Great abolished the patriarchy, made the czar head of the Russian Orthodox Church, and transformed the priesthood into a wing of the state bureaucracy.

Ironically, the Bolsheviks restored the church's independence, at least in theory, but persecuted believers and repurposed thousands of church properties as factories, storehouses, and hostels. For a time after 1931, St. Isaac's was used as an anti-religion museum and later as a World War II bunker. After 1945, its interior frescoes, icons, and alcoves and its neo-classical exterior were fully restored, and it became the tourist attraction that it remains today. —Fred Weir, *The Christian Science Monitor*

Chief rabbi of Venice works for return of Jewish community

Five centuries ago the Jewish people of Venice were forced to live in a segregated community that became known as the first-ever ghetto, a cramped but bustling community that at its height boasted nine synagogues.

But as the population of Venice has fallen over the years due to mass tourism and spiraling costs, so too have the number of Jewish people.

Now the chief rabbi of Venice, Scialom Bahbout, says the city's Jewish community has to reinvent itself. Only 500 Jewish people remain in Venice, with another 500 in the nearby towns of Padua, Verona, and Trieste—a small percentage of the country's 30,000 Jewish population.

"Like the city of Venice itself, the community is becoming more and more of a museum," Bahbout said. "We need a city that is alive."

Bahbout's office sits above one of the community's hidden gems, the Scola Ponentina, or Spanish synagogue. Completed in 1580, it was built by Sephardic Jews who sought refuge in Venice after being expelled from Spain.

The synagogue, which is still used, lies behind heavy wooden doors and has an ornate wooden ceiling, large chandeliers, and a decorative stone floor. It is one of five synagogues that remain.

"Most young people are leaving for places where they are assured of a more comprehensive Jewish life; in Italy, that means Milan or Rome," he said. "Many also move to Israel, Paris, or New York."

Bahbout, who was born in Libya and migrated to Italy with his family in the 1950s, said the first Jews arrived in Venice in the tenth century. As the former Venetian Republic flourished over the centuries, many Jews from elsewhere in Europe sought refuge there.

In 1516 the city-state ruled that



Rabbi Scialom Bahbout

RNS PHOTO BY JOSEPHINE MCINNEN

Jewish people were to be locked behind gates at night. They were deprived of owning property and forced to wear a yellow item as identification, often a badge or hat, which was humiliating.

Strolling through the narrow alleys in the ghetto today, visitors see few reminders of how difficult the ghetto residents' lives were.

Nevertheless, Bahbout said, Venice became a center of learning, renowned for printing and publishing Jewish books and manuscripts, and paradoxically a place where Jews were able to practice their faith.

"Life in the ghetto was vibrant because

the Jews were not homogeneous—it was a melting pot," said Riccardo Calimani, a historian who has published a book about the ghetto. "Through publishing they attracted intellectuals from abroad, and the community became a bridge between northern Europe and Constantinople."

Calimani, whose family arrived in Venice in 1508, is also a former president of the Jewish community in Venice.

The gates were finally removed from the ghetto when Napoleon Bonaparte and his troops conquered the city in 1797. Their civil rights restored, Jewish people played a prominent role in Italy's unification in the 19th century.

In 1938 Benito Mussolini introduced racial laws, and during the Nazi occupation of Italy, 246 Jewish people were deported from Venice to extermination camps. Only eight returned.

Last year, Venice hosted a major exhibition titled *Venice, the Jews, and Europe: 1516–2016*, which drew thousands of visitors.

Bahbout hopes the success of that event will energize the community.

"Even though we are a small community, we have deep roots," he said. "We need to reinforce and strengthen those roots." —Josephine McKenna, Religion News Service

In India, a legal group defends Muslims accused in terrorism cases

Eleven years ago, Shahid Nadeem witnessed the blasts that left 37 people dead and more than 100 injured in the small town of Malegaon, 167 miles from Mumbai.

Police rounded up nine Muslim men and charged them with the crime. The men were poor and had no lawyers.

"I saw innocent men taken by the police," Nadeem said. "There was nobody to appear for them."

The experience inspired Nadeem, then an undergraduate, to become a lawyer. He now works for the nonprofit Jamiat Ulama-e-Maharashtra's legal arm, which defends wrongfully accused terrorism suspects.

The Malegaon blast was one of two major bombings in India in 2006 in which Muslim men were arrested or detained, with some charged and later tried.

"People started coming to us," said Gulzar Azmi, the general secretary of the organization's legal group, both Muslims and others. "If there is a poor Hindu, we don't differentiate."

To date, the group has helped get acquittals for more than 100 men, and it currently has about 600 cases. It also challenged the Organized Crime Act, which conferred wide-ranging powers on investigating agencies.

The Jamiat takes cases for free and taps some of the country's best-known criminal lawyers to argue them. The group's funding is drawn entirely from *zakat*, charitable donations Muslims give as a religious obligation.

Muslims in India constitute about 14 percent of the nation's 1.2 billion people. But those Muslims are worse off socio-economically and overrepresented in the criminal justice system. For a while it seemed as if arrests had slowed, but with the rise of the self-described Islamic State group, the trend reversed.

Sharif Shaikh, a Mumbai lawyer who regularly takes on some of the Jamiat's

clients, has seen case after case in which innocent Muslim men allege that they have been harassed or tortured by police.

"We have managed to get many acquittals when we were able to apprise the court of the real facts," he said, "but people's entire lives have been destroyed, and society doesn't accept them back."

Mufti Abdul Qayyum knows what it feels like to return to society after more than a decade in prison on false charges.

"I had no money," he said. "Without the Jamiat's help I wouldn't have been able to fight." —Bhavya Dore, Religion News Service



DEFENDING THE INNOCENT: Javed Abdul Majid (left), who was convicted and spent eight years behind bars in a terrorism case, meeting with Gulzar Azmi, from the legal group defending him, after being released.

People



■ **Michael Novak**, a Catholic theologian who argued that capitalism fostered social well-being, died February 17 at the age of 83 in Washington, D.C.

The cause of death was complications from colon cancer, the *Washington Post* reported.

He authored or edited more than 50 books, his most well-known being *The Spirit of Democratic Capitalism*, published in 1982. He received the Templeton Prize in 1994 for his "influential new insights into the spiritual foundations of economic and political systems."

He taught at the Catholic University of America, the University of Notre Dame, and Harvard University, among other institutions. Novak was affiliated with the American Enterprise Institute, a think tank, beginning in 1978.

"During his varied career, he moved from left to right on the political spectrum," Catholic News Service wrote. "During the Second Vatican Council, he wrote *The Open Church*, which took a liberal look at the council. . . . In 1982, as a neoconservative, he founded *Crisis Magazine*."

According to the biography on his website, Novak's work "sprung from his childhood in Johnstown, Pennsylvania, a steel town in the middle of coal country" where his Slovak immigrant ancestors settled.

John Garvey, Catholic University president, remembered him as "a man of great intellectual honesty. Unlike some scholars, Michael Novak made it a point to reflect on new and different topics, always with a fresh and dynamic perspective." —the *CHRISTIAN CENTURY* staff

■ **Richard Reinhold Niebuhr**, a theologian and influential teacher, died February 26 at age 90.

He began teaching at Harvard Divinity School in 1956, the school noted in announcing his death, and retired as professor emeritus.

He was author, among other works, of the book *Experiential Religion*.

He was the son of theologian H. Richard Niebuhr, author of *Christ and Culture*, and father of Gustav Niebuhr, a religion journalist who now teaches at Syracuse University.

In a *CHRISTIAN CENTURY* article published in 1960, "The problem of preaching at Easter," Niebuhr wrote that "it is a relatively easy thing to muse on the story of the first Easter, for it is not Easter as such that is a scandal," even to modern people. "The difficulty arises at the juncture in which the humanity of Christ and our own humanity are equated or not equated, at the juncture in which we either do or do not recognize ourselves in him and him in ourselves."

What is required is the image of Christ as the one "in whose own humanity our own image is reflected and simultaneously freed of its distortions," he wrote. "Unless the gospel is uttered in such a way that it evokes in us not only a sense of our individuality but also of our humanity, there is little point in dwelling on the Christ who is for us."

In his 1965 contribution to the series "How I am making up my mind," he wrote: "The work of the theologian is not simply to clarify the logic of faith by abstracting it from this complex human world but rather to steady faith by sharpening its expressiveness and practical efficacy in this complex world." —the *CHRISTIAN CENTURY* staff

■ **Doug Coe**, organizer of the annual National Prayer Breakfast and a spiritual guide to many politicians, died February 21 at age 88.

Coe died at his home in Annapolis, Maryland, after a heart attack and stroke, said A. Larry Ross, spokesman for Coe's family.

Coe was the longtime head of the International Foundation, a Christian

organization also known as the Fellowship and as the Family, which was responsible for bringing together politicians, diplomats, and presidents since Dwight Eisenhower in Washington, D.C., each year on the first Thursday in February. At the most recent gathering, at which President Trump spoke, Coe remained out of the limelight as usual.

Time magazine named Coe on its 2005 list of 25 influential evangelicals, calling him "the Stealth Persuader." Coe tried unsuccessfully to convince the editors to remove his name and then declined to provide a photo.

"He was a man who liked to work behind the scenes, who did not call attention to himself, who was a sort of a pastor to people in power," said Michael Cromartie, director of the Evangelicals in Civic Life program at Washington's Ethics and Public Policy Center. "He would meet with anybody if it would mean he'd get a chance to talk about Jesus to them."

In her memoir Hillary Clinton described Coe as "a genuinely loving spiritual mentor and guide to anyone, regardless of party or faith, who wants to deepen his or her relationship to God."

[Jeff Sharlet wrote a book about Coe's organization in 2008, *The Family: The Secret Fundamentalism at the Heart of American Power*. In a review for the *CHRISTIAN CENTURY*, James L. Guth summarized Sharlet's argument that the Family advanced a cultural agenda during the 1980s that ignored issues of poverty and the environment, and that "the messianic direction of U.S. foreign policy since the 1960s is largely the handiwork of the Family's person-to-person spiritual diplomacy with foreign autocrats." Yet the book has more assertions than evidence, Guth wrote.]

In 2008 Sharlet predicted that Coe would prove to be more influential than conservative Christian leaders such as James Dobson.

"Dobson might be able to muscle his way on an individual vote or in an individual election, but Coe and the Family's influence is going to be much longer term, much more enduring," he said. —Adelle M. Banks, Religion News Service



PHOTO COURTESY OF HARVARD DIVINITY SCHOOL



PHOTO COURTESY OF A. LARRY ROSS

LIVING The Word

April 13, Maundy Thursday

John 13:1-17, 31b-35

IN ISAIAH we read praise for feet: “How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of the messenger who announces peace, who brings good news, who announces salvation, who says to Zion, ‘Your God reigns’” (52:7). The prophet says nothing about what these feet look like. They are beautiful because of what they can do.

On January 21, the day after the presidential inauguration, my own pair of feet joined some 250,000 others that took over the streets of downtown Chicago during the Women’s March. After an initial rally, we were ready to take off marching—but by then officials had declared that there would be no march, because there were just too many people.

This did not stop some of us, however, from heading west along the original march route. Shod in sturdy footwear, I joined the peaceful crowd-in-motion as people of every age, gender, sexual orientation, and skin color pressed forward down Jackson Street. On the sidewalks, hundreds of people stood as witnesses to our action. From above, helicopters documented the mass of citizens who had decided to make our views known with our feet.

I quickly found that it is not easy to keep your footing on city streets that are cracked and patched. You have to be careful of potholes and raised manhole covers. And it is tricky to keep your balance when the marchers are packed body to body. You have to take short steps—in order to avoid knocking into other bodies, which at any moment may suddenly stop or shift or sway a different way. Yet we pressed on, joyfully, cheerfully.

Why were masses of people marching, in Chicago and elsewhere? For many reasons, and for many people: for women, for immigrants and refugees, for children facing an uncertain environmental future, for Muslims facing discrimination. And so much more. Their beautiful feet marching upon the asphalt sought to bring peace and to be good news. In short, whether Christian or not, the people who marched that day called for what Jesus commands in today’s gospel: “Love one another. Just as I have loved you, you should also love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”

According to John’s version of the story of the Last Supper, when Jesus says, “Do this,” he is not referring to breaking bread and sharing wine and remembering him through these symbolic actions. Instead he says, “Wash feet.”

Jesus shocks his disciples when he washes their feet. He “got up from the table, took off his outer robe, and tied a towel around himself. Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples’ feet and to wipe them with the towel that was tied around him.” He performs a servant’s task. He washes the dust off his disciples’ feet, the very dirt and grime they have accumulated by walking with him from Ephraim to Jerusalem.

“Do you know what I have done?” he asks them. “So, if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet. For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you.”

The liturgical ritual we enact on Maundy Thursday is challenging. “Do this.” Be a servant; wash feet. The rite calls for real water, for really kneeling down and caressing real feet, for real washing and drying. It calls for real love of one another, feet first.

“By this,” says Jesus, “everyone will know that you are my disciples.” When the Maundy Thursday service is over, we walk out to find suffering right at our feet. We see the hungry veteran who sits for hours on the city sidewalk. His handmade sign asks for our help, for someone to see him as a child of God in need of food and drink, maybe even a bit of love. We hear the chants of activists who continue to call us to see the plight of those who thirst for justice. They challenge us, the baptized, to connect the waters of new birth with the very real thirst of the people of Flint, with the water protectors at Standing Rock Reservation, with the poor of Laredo and Juarez who live along the Rio Grande but who have no potable water.

The day of the Women’s March, more than 3.5 million people gathered in cities and towns and villages around the United States. Many were attending a march for the first time. People gathered in solidarity in city squares and other public spaces on every continent on earth. They carried homemade signs, brightly colored to try to attract attention. Many of the signs shouted, “Love!” People walked in snow and rain to declare their solidarity and love for one another. Many in the United States have committed to keep marching. They include vulnerable people and others who march to protect them.

Jesus did not say that only those with pretty feet can walk with him. He called all his followers to walk courageously as his messengers of love to those who are unloved, to announce God’s peace in the midst of conflict, to bring the good news that God’s reign breaks forth. It breaks forth wherever we wash feet, wherever we are known as disciples by our love for one another. “Do this!” How will we, the servants of the Servant, answer his command?

Reflections on the lectionary

April 14, Good Friday

John 18:1–19:42

SO THEY TOOK Jesus; and, carrying the cross by himself, he went out to what is called The Place of the Skull, which in Hebrew is called Golgotha.”

As a child, I gathered with my entire grammar school in our parish church every Friday from the beginning of Lent through Good Friday. We were there for the Stations of the Cross, the devotion that involves 14 images depicting moments from the day of Jesus’ death, from Jesus being condemned to being laid in the tomb. They were hung at regular intervals on our church’s brick walls.

As I remember it, a priest would work his way around the church’s perimeter aisles, joined by acolytes with cross and candles. At each of the 14 stations we stopped, prayed, and sang a verse of the “Stabat Mater,” a 13th-century hymn to Mary that tells the Passion story from the perspective of the Sorrowful Mother of Jesus. We joined in Mary’s lament. Eight years of participating in this Lenten practice left the melody of that mournful song seared in my memory.

On Good Friday, Jesus’ walk to Calvary—carrying his own cross—comes to life in cities and villages around the world. Public processions take place in Spain and Italy and Mexico, in Central and South America, in the Philippines. People process down asphalt streets and along dirt pathways, reenacting and prayerfully remembering the Passion of Our Lord.

In Chicago, a major *Via Crucis* (Way of the Cross) procession goes through the streets of the Pilsen neighborhood, where there is a large Mexican-American population. People come from around the city to participate in this devotional walk. Adults, teens, and children dress up and take on the roles of characters involved in the story, while empathizing with Jesus’ pain and joining their sufferings with his. This year, at a time of great fear among immigrant communities, many, many are suffering.

For 30 years, New York members of the Pax Christi USA organization have taken to the streets on Good Friday for a Way of the Cross procession that winds its way through Manhattan. Typically the route involves stopping and praying at sites of power—political, financial, and military. The organization’s website explains that they take this communal action for the purpose of “connecting the sufferings of Christ during his passion with the suffering of our brothers and sisters at the hands of violence, greed, poverty, sickness and war.” The site also lists walks planned in more than a dozen

states, and it provides resources such as “Stations in a Time of Terror,” “Eco Stations of the Cross,” and “The Stations of Justice.”

Because the Stations of the Cross is a devotional practice—a popular custom rather than an official Catholic liturgical rite—creativity is encouraged in many parishes. (I recall my nephew and his grammar school classmates presenting the stations through mime.) For church leaders and worship teams in churches both Protestant and Catholic, the Stations of the Cross on Good Friday—whether done inside a church or outdoors—presents an unparalleled opportunity for creativity and innovation.

A church in Roseburg, Oregon, calls upon different groups within the parish to create a set of media images for each of the stations. Teens from the youth ministry, members of the social justice committee, a men’s group, a women’s group, and others take turns selecting and projecting photographs from contemporary situations around the world—situations that parallel the moments the ritual recalls.

This sort of practice offers great spiritual benefit. When children, teens, and adults create their own media art, they end up contemplating the biblical stories of the Passion more intently than they have before. They engage in theological reflection; they make connections between those stories and their own stories. They can prepare a version of the Stations of the Cross that reimagines the story visually and verbally from different perspectives: that of immigrants struggling on circuitous routes toward a new country safer than theirs, of refugees risking leaky and overfilled boats to try to cross the seas to land anywhere other than their war-torn country, of prisoners reflecting on their own *Via Crucis*, of women who have suffered domestic violence and sexual abuse, of people who have lost their jobs and now live on the street, or of those who struggle with addictions.

Media art and Web technology also make it easier for people to prayerfully celebrate the Stations of the Cross even if they can’t physically walk from station to station. Communities of people living with chronic pain or debilitating illness could connect via video conference. Together they could create and pray their own virtual stations, crafted from the moments of their lives. Veterans, too, could join together in person or online to script stations that speak to the sorrows they have seen and lived. Within the broad framework of the Way of the Cross, the possibilities are only limited by a faith community’s collective imagination.

The author is Eileen D. Crowley, associate professor of liturgy arts and communication at Catholic Theological Union in Chicago.

LIVING The Word

April 16, Resurrection of the Lord
John 20:1-18

IT WAS A SOUND like I had never heard. A deep, guttural cry, a groan of deep pain. It sounded both nearby and far off, and I wondered where it was coming from. Then I realized it was coming from me.

It was a Sunday, and I was in church. I had helped lead worship that day, so I was sitting on the dais. Then the pastor invited all who desired healing to come join him for prayer at the altar—and before I knew it, I was out of my seat and halfway there. Normally I would have hesitated, telling myself that, as a minister, I should go only to pray with others who came forward. Or I'd have reminded myself that I was relatively new at this church, and I wouldn't want strangers to wonder what was wrong with me. But when the call for prayer came, my feet moved faster than my tendency to self-protect.

I was struggling that day; I'd been struggling for months. My husband and I had experienced two miscarriages in six months. I couldn't pray on my own anymore—I was too angry, too hurt. I'd been doing what I thought was a good job holding it together on the outside—going to work, going to church, showing up. Inside, I was exhausted. I'd never experienced loss like this before, and I didn't know how to grieve. I wanted healing, less for my body than for my broken heart and busted-up faith, because I was tired of feeling like a shell of myself.

At the altar, I knelt on the cushion and rested my head and arms on the rail. I closed my eyes, and the pastor began to pray. That's when I heard the cry, my cry. It sounded horrible, but it felt amazing—like the first real thing I'd done in months. And so I kept crying out over and over again. My eyes were still closed, but I began to feel a bustle of activity around me. People were doing what Minister Me would have done if someone else made that terrible sound: patting my back, wiping my forehead, trying to make me comfortable, continuing to pray. But even with all the commotion, I felt somehow quiet, like I had finally expressed something true to God.

In our Gospel text, Mary Magdalene discovers that Jesus' tomb is open and his body is missing. She runs to tell the disciples, and two men rush back to the scene with her. When they see for themselves that Jesus is indeed gone, they turn and go home. Mary stays—though she doesn't understand any better than they do. She remains at the site of her grief and cries. Strangers meet her there. They ask her why she cries, and she is forced to revisit the pain by naming it again and again.

Before that day at the altar, I kept looking for the right way to grieve. Falling apart didn't seem right—not in the face of so

many daily responsibilities that needed my attention. Skipping over the grief didn't seem right either. Not just our loved ones but our hoped-for ones had died. That seemed like it was worth some attention—even if, or maybe because, we never had the chance to meet them. Some friends recommended moving through the grief slowly, creating ritual around it. This seemed like an unbearable torture—and it seemed that if I moved too slowly, I might never emerge. I literally felt like I was left at the site of an empty tomb, an empty womb. I didn't think I could bear to stay there.

But Mary stays. She stays and cries; she lets grief prevail. And at grief's mercy, she stays at the site of her loss, face to face with the empty tomb.

I already knew that grief is a process you can't rush or control. You mostly just survive its waves until you realize they're easing up, little by little. But Mary manages to do more than survive. Somehow she emerges with something she did not have before. Staying at the site of her loss—not running away, but letting herself experience and express the pain—she encounters revelation. When the strangers she meets compel her to name her pain, she realizes that things are not quite as she thought.

Singer LeAnn Rimes recently described her album *Remnants* as her experience of learning the value of falling apart. She said that the first time we encounter something that threatens to really knock us back, our tendency is to fight to keep standing. We think this is victory, this is grieving well. But Rimes has learned to give in to falling apart—and discovering the beauty in it. When you crumble, she says, you're able to assess the pieces and preserve the remnant that is authentically you. From those authentic pieces, you can be remade anew.

There is a resurrection that comes of grief. The one who grieves is herself resurrected as someone new, with a new understanding of herself and of God. Mary's turning point comes when she tearfully describes how Jesus, her loved one, her hoped-for one, is not only dead but missing—utterly gone. Then God calls her by name, revealing that the one she thought she lost was right in front of her. She brings her tears to the tomb and leaves celebrating new life.

When I got up from the altar, I was different. I was not miraculously cured of my grief; I have had many hard days since that one. But I went to the site of my grief and let my broken heart fall apart—and when I was all poured out, I met God there. I could finally see that God had been there all along, waiting for me to be real. God revealed that beyond my empty womb, my broken heart, I was still in there. God called my name and called me back to life.

Reflections on the lectionary

April 23, Second Sunday of Easter

1 Peter 1:3-9, John 20:19-31

IN THE FILM *Boycott*, about the 1955 Montgomery bus boycott, there's a scene in which Martin Luther King Jr. and local civil rights leader E. D. Nixon are standing outside Nixon's house as it burns to the ground. Nixon knows that white supremacists are behind the arson, but he also seems to know that they will go unpunished. Adding fuel to the fire, the fire department has arrived at the burning house, but the white firefighters elect simply to lean against their trucks and look on while it burns.

King arrives and stands beside Nixon, both of them helpless as the house goes up in flames. Nixon asks King how he can stick to his nonviolent principles—or if he even should—as he and his family are physically threatened and attacked by the powers opposing them. King doesn't answer him directly. Instead, speaking slowly as though it pains him to do so, he quotes from the letter to the Hebrews, chapter 10, verse 39: "But we do not belong to those who shrink back and are destroyed, but to those who have faith and are saved" (NIV).

King is remembered as a great leader, a great speaker, a man of great moral courage. It is worth remembering that he was also a man of great faith—that he took his faith seriously, and its role in the struggle for civil rights for African Americans. King worked for civil rights because he believed that the rights and privileges of Americans should actually apply to all Americans, but also because he believed in upholding the God-given dignity of blacks in America, even if whites and their accompanying power structure refused to acknowledge it. He hoped for a day when racism would be eradicated and the world would be safe for African Americans, safe for the poor, safe for everyone.

These last few years have felt like reliving the history of American racism and global discrimination in some twisted, condensed version. Trayvon Martin was killed by a neighbor who saw himself as the law, Michael Brown by a police officer who saw himself as a victim; both shooters went free without convictions, as fatal shootings of African Americans and other minorities continued. Syrian people died in their communities and died trying to get out as we watched on TV—the way we watched Rwanda and Bosnia and so on. The Pulse shooting targeted the club's LGBTQ clients; the election rhetoric targeted women, Muslims, people of color, and others.

These collective experiences take their toll. I feel it in my

body and soul: a sadness, a pain, a loss, a reopening of scarred places. And I hear it in the words of my neighbors: a sense of tragic loss, helplessness, fear, and anger. Those of us who count ourselves as people of faith have the challenge of maintaining this identity while also managing all these feelings. We stand and stare at the burning places, wondering if we chose the right team.

The disciples of Jesus must have felt something similar in the hours and days after Jesus' death. The Gospel text for this Sunday describes them hiding behind locked doors "for fear of the Jews." When they chose this radical carpenter-turned-prophet to get behind, only to see him crucified, they too must have wondered if they chose the right side.

But when King quotes Hebrews, I hear him saying this: our faith is not meant to keep us from responding to the violence inflicted upon us. Our faith is the response to this violence. We feel the pain and sadness, even helplessness and loss. But we don't let our feelings make us shrink back from our values. We don't succumb to the fear that our opponents are stronger than we are. Instead, we believe and are saved. We believe that our God is strong, that what we stand for is true, that God is honored by our resistance to injustice, that God is pleased when we refuse to submit to fear and helplessness. This belief is our salvation.

The reading from 1 Peter unpacks this as the precious gift we have in faith. It is faith that allows us to persist through struggle, while at the same time the struggle tests and—if we allow it—refines our faith, making it stronger than before. Untested faith is not as valuable as faith that's had to stand and stare at a burning home—without turning around and introducing yet more violence, more death, more hate, and more loss into the world. Tested faith trains us to believe more in God's ability to give us life than our enemies' ability to extinguish it.

The Birmingham affiliate of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference produced a commitment card for those who would join in their civil rights efforts. It required pledging yourself to ten different commitments. The first was to meditate daily on the life and teachings of Jesus Christ. The second was to "remember always that the nonviolent movement seeks justice and reconciliation—not victory." Tested faith, I believe, is what God will be looking for when it's all said and done—not whether we won all the fights we entered, but whether we could be found fighting faithfully for justice, truth, compassion, and love.

The author is Ayanna Johnson Watkins, director of the National Benevolent Association of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ).

PASTORAL RESPONSES IN THE AFTERMATH OF VIOLENCE

Post-traumatic ministry

by Laurie Kraus, David Holyan, and Bruce Wismer

A DOUBLE MURDER and suicide took place on a church property in a large suburban congregation. Two adult congregation members and a member of the youth group were dead. A few weeks later, during Lent, the pastor shared from the pulpit a theological shift that had occurred within her own thinking since the trauma. Growing up, she explained, she had memorized and recited the Apostles' Creed with one omission: the phrase "he descended into hell." Her own childhood pastor, who did not believe that Jesus had descended into hell, had personally crossed out that line in every hymnbook the congregation owned. Consequently, she had never integrated Jesus' descent into hell into her theology.

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But something had changed, she said. She realized that “this congregation has descended into hell. And if we have had to go down into hell, it is comforting to know that Jesus has been there before us, and can show us the way out.” This pastor’s report on her shift in thinking made the story of Jesus’ death and resurrection deeply personal and real, not just for that Lenten season, but for the many seasons of pastoral care that lay ahead.

Sometimes violence impacts an entire congregation or community, not just a family or individuals. Its rippling effects spread across the land and may even pass through generations. In the wake of such disaster, the preacher and presider’s immediate task is to allow scripture and ritual practice to support a congregation as people frame their theological response.

In our work with local congregations after communal trauma (including 9/11; the mass shootings in Tucson and Newtown; the pipeline explosion in San Bruno, California; and the Boston Marathon bombing), we’ve learned that there are many ways to frame a theological response to violence. Some people reaffirm what was before; some, like the pastor in the story above, make a courageous leap of faith and are transformed. As a congregation travels through the aftermath of communal trauma, responses will vary and evolve.

Walking through the valley can’t be avoided, and it can’t be rushed.

Often the first response to violence in a congregation or community is an adrenaline-fueled heroism. In the face of abject terror, the desire to exert normalcy and control in a situation runs high. Phrases like, “We won’t let this change anything,” “Let’s keep Sunday just as we had planned,” and “Our hope is in the Lord!” are on the lips, hearts, and minds of many. Yet such expressions more frequently express a reactive avoidance of pain rather than a faithful proclamation that bears witness to the truth of what has happened.

The 23rd Psalm speaks of the need to walk through the valley of the shadow of death. It’s natural to want to avoid the valley, or to run through it and get beyond the shadow of death as quickly as possible. Walking through the valley involves a slow, deliberate journey through the very places that cause the most fear. God may provide reassuring presence along this journey, but God does not save people from having to make the trek. It’s impossible to go back and undo a disaster. And it’s unhealthy to avoid the pain that violence imprints upon a communal landscape.

Pastors may unintentionally enable such avoidance by moving too quickly toward words of comfort, hope, forgiveness, and reconciliation. In so doing, they ignore what needs to be faced: the pain and hurt, the rip in the fabric of life, the taste of tears shed in disbelief and anger. Immediately after an event,

particularly on the first Sunday after a trauma, the worship service provides space for pain to be expressed in community. The time will come when hope, peace, and love emerge in celebratory ways. But it may take years for the energy of a traumatic event to dissipate fully. In the early stages, lament and compassionate presence are appropriate congregational responses.

Lament is a critical engagement of people whose world and faith assumptions have been shattered, often by something beyond their control. “This wasn’t supposed to happen” is the complaint that fuels the psalms of lament. Through violence, the world becomes threatening and incoherent. There is an anguished longing for sacred spaces to be inviolate, places where God’s good order can still be affirmed and maintained. But just as the world is not free of trauma, neither is the life of the church, embedded and incarnate as it is in the world. As people lament, they mourn the failure of the world and the God they once trusted. Lament dwells in the faith-language of bewilderment, anger, loss, and grief.

A worship service in the time of lament might be thought of as a walk through the valley of the shadow of death in three movements:

Letting go (releasing what was and seeking sanctuary in the presence of God)

Letting be (being present to God and one another in the midst of distress)

Letting begin (beginning to walk and work in the valley of the shadow)

Such a worship service can be structured to help gradually unfold the congregation’s shock, anger, grief, and loss, punctuated by moments of human comfort and signs of God’s love. At the same time, gathering in lament means acknowledging from the start the many feelings in the room, the event that has overturned the community, the church as the right place for lament, and the God who is present in the valley.

Besides offering lament, church leaders can walk with those who grieve by being a compassionate presence. The aim is not to try to fix the situation or make people feel better, but rather to enter gently into the suffering of others.

While showing up is often considered to be nine-tenths of the job, in trauma response the quality of showing up is most important. Rather than responding like crime-fighting superheroes, church leaders can be most helpful by offering a calm, reflective presence. While the actual experience of trauma may seem to unfold in slow motion, pastors are inclined to respond by moving at warp speed. There are so many people to check on, so much to do, so much to maintain, so much to plan. Work multiplies just at the time when it’s important to slow down.

Part of walking through trauma involves dealing with disillusionment, the stage that emerges as the immediate heroic behavior begins to dissipate. Heroism is unsustainable for the long haul. In its wake, disillusionment rises, bringing the loss of belief and trust. A community and its members struggle as feelings of rage, hatred, vengeance, and hope-

lessness displace joy, peace, and purpose. Within faith communities, disillusionment can feel like stagnation and spiritlessness, as if the congregation has slowly ground to a halt.

Leadership in this season involves discovering a new identity, one that has been altered by the trauma or violence. It means finding new ways to be productive rather than disengaged, discovering meaning, and embodying the fullness of life even while living with pain. This is the difficult beginning of the work of healing.

Disillusionment is painful but it is not unhealthy. Rather, it serves as a necessary corrective to denial or naive idealism. It allows people to integrate a traumatic event and its impact. It is a natural but difficult progression, often met with resistance. It involves accepting that the trauma really happened, the loss is real, and circumstances are as bad as they feel.

In the phase of disillusionment, the practice of storytelling is more difficult than during ordinary times—but also more crucial. Community members who are ordinarily eager to share their personal stories may resist it during this season. Emotions and conversations can be raw and intense. The trauma may cause or uncover diffused feelings of hostility or underlying conflict that move people toward a stance of avoidance. Yet, according to experts on trauma, a necessary compo-

nent in normalizing and healing the effects of trauma is the narration of personal stories about the event. When church leaders are deliberate and transparent about gathering for conversation in such times, it will encourage gathering and talking among the congregation as well.

But narratives are easily thwarted when there is a traumatic incident or violent event within a congregation. Rumors and innuendos might be circulated. Facts might be misreported in local news accounts. Congregational leaders may find that they need to encourage truth telling and guard against rumors and half-truths.

In some situations there may be valid reasons for narrative to be restricted. An ongoing criminal investigation may limit the flow of information. A crisis intervention protocol may need to be followed. When traumatic violence occurs within the congregational system, relationships may be compromised by feelings of guilt or expressions of blame. Providing pastoral care to the family of a perpetrator may be perceived as conflicting with the provision of care to survivors. Congregants may choose sides or press inappropriately for information. It can be difficult for pastors to balance the importance of honest narrative with the ethics of pastoral confidentiality.

The newspaper guy

Four days a week the newspaper guy drives by at dawn or dawnish And flips the paper toward our house from the window of his Olds. It lands in a different spot every single time. This fascinates me no End. I mean, he's flipped it hundreds of times and not once that we Remember did it ever land in the same place twice. My lovely wife Is fascinated by how wide the range of landing sites is—the garden, The path, the rosemary bushes, the annual booming dandelion farm, Once the welcome mat by the door, once amazingly *on the chair by The door*—a spectacular shot, when you think about it. Twice I have Been unaccountably up early enough to see the thing done. He slows Infinitesimally from about twenty miles per hour to nineteen and out Flies the paper. He's an older guy, from what I can see. Probably this Is his second job, or he's retired and picking up a little cash. The day When the paper was delivered by a boy is gone. I was that boy, once. Now it's the guy in the Olds. We take the little astonishing things for Granted. People make the paper, and manufacture it, and distribute it, And four mornings a week a man calculates lift and arc and parabola With a fine and experienced eye and whip of the wrist. It's just a tiny Thing, but it isn't small at all, is it? All the attention is on economics, The decline of papers, the man forced to take on a second job, the old Battered car held together by spit and tape. But he's great at the thing He does every morning, even if sometimes his throw causes a ruckus Among the tomato plants. The whole essential point of every religion And all forms of genuine love is to see the miracle of what is right in Front of you, isn't that so? Attentiveness is the first food, the overture In the unimaginably intricate gracious symphony: something like that.

Brian Doyle

As individuals narrate their own experiences after trauma, the importance of being in community cannot be overstated. “If you want to go fast, walk alone. If you want to go far, walk together.” This African proverb is a reminder that being in community, caring for others, and listening to one another are crucial parts of the healing process for individuals and the congregation, which eventually leads to a new sense of orientation. Together, the community recovering from a trauma orients itself by finding a shared direction, working toward acceptance.

Human-caused disasters are often incomprehensible. Acceptance requires acknowledging the situation, facing the facts, and witnessing to the impact it has in survivors' lives and in the life of the community. Some of the work of accepting comes naturally over time. People are generally resilient and, given the necessary resources, they will begin the work of accepting and integrating the trauma into their lives and worldviews.

This is difficult work, and the leaders of religious communities impacted by violence are not immune to the effects of posttraumatic stress. In fact, the impact of such events on professional leadership may be complicated and more sustained than the impact on the congregation and its members. Frequently, pastors and church staff report that they begin to feel worse just as the congregation is beginning to feel better. This vocational trauma sometimes begins during the event's immediate aftermath, but more often it emerges or intensifies after the initial period of heroism.

In some cases, pastors and staff leaders put their own grieving and processing on hold while they tend to the life of the community. Like a mother who goes hungry to provide food for her children, church leaders may give away all they have, again and again, justifying their neglect of self-care by the urgency and intensity of need in the congregation. Intending to nourish themselves later, they may fail to do so until far too much time has passed.

Just as a church's mission is changed by trauma, a pastor's call might change following violence, particularly after congregational life reaches a new normal. Sustaining or addressing a changed sense of call after a crisis entails attentiveness, a willingness to adapt, and faithful engagement. Some church leaders find it useful at this stage to work with a spiritual director or participate in vocational counseling. Some may reengage; others may relinquish parts of, or sometimes the entirety of, ministry.

Leaders whose pastoral calling changes after a trauma can look to scripture to know that they are not alone. Early in Mark's Gospel, Jesus outlines a ministry plan to his disciples: "Let us go on to the neighboring towns, so that I may proclaim the message there also; for that is what I came out to do" (Mark 1:38). As he sets out on this mission, a leper stops Jesus in the road and asks him for healing. Jesus, moved with pity, stretches out his hand and heals the man. Because Jesus chooses to heal the leper, Mark says, his ministry changes. He can no longer go into the towns openly to proclaim the message as he's planned. Instead, he stays out in the country and waits for people to come to him.

Jesus made a choice when he was confronted by suffering, and thereafter he could not go back to the ministry he had planned before. Violence in church or community demands such choices from congregational leaders. When leaders choose to stop, touch, and be changed by the impact of human-caused disaster, it changes preaching, worship, and mission. The moment of choosing is a crossroads, a cross-place.

In the Celtic Christian tradition, the cross is a metaphor for the human spiritual journey. The cross is the place where things change, the place where things fall away. But it is also the place where new life may form. As Lent is punctuated by "little Easters," so can the after-

math of trauma—with all of the diminishment and scarcity that those long days entail—contain moments of joy, clarity, and purposefulness.

The time after trauma in a congregation's life is complex and challenging, marked by seemingly endless wandering through the wilderness of grief, bewilderment, and loss. No one would choose it; most prefer to avoid it. But there is no Easter without Good Friday. Lent, however painful a season, is the way Jesus walked through the valley of the shadow that concluded with death and resurrection. It can be so for the church too.

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Who gets to interpret me?

Bodies in the vernacular

by Brian Bantum

THEY SAY it's best to avoid conversations about religion, sex, and politics. Social media seems to heighten the wisdom of this council. Foolishly or not, I tend not to heed it. But recently I have found myself in strange territory. Not simply angry or frustrated, but lost—as though we were all looking out the same window yet describing different worlds. Again and again, conversations on these subjects conjure Babel. We want to see and to know God, but it all ends in chaos and confusion.

Amid regular news reports about police shootings of unarmed black men and women, or pastors being defrocked for performing a same-sex wedding, or questions about diversity in higher education (or anywhere, really)—other people's pain or anger or understanding seems a distant, hazy idea. We get stuck in a conversation that spins around the same two or three phrases, and everyone begins to wonder how the other can't see, can't understand. Are we even speaking the same language?

They're not. We're not.

This lack of understanding is in the air; it's the atmosphere of our current moment. Our so-called dialogues have well-worn steps now, like the melody of a Top 40 song that you know before the third beat.

Black lives matter!

But don't all lives matter? I really don't think we ought to focus on our differences.

Everyone in the room shifts nervously, and soon enough the conversation begins to spin. Historical references to legacies of systemic violence. Contrary evidence about someone's black neighbor they have known for years.

Can't you see that it isn't about individual choices?

I don't understand why you are getting so angry.

I am not a racist!

And the words spin past each other even faster. Maybe other people jump in, or maybe the room clears until dessert.

It's not natural, goes another well-worn conversation. Adam and Eve are the first marriage.

But gender isn't just XX or XY.

Each person points to scripture or historical precedents or theological justifications.

No, I don't hate gay people, God just intended something very specific.

But can't you see that "natural" is a category that has more to do with what people have said in the past than something divine-ly ordered?

And the melody plays again. We know how it goes.

How did we get here—ostensibly speaking the same language, yet failing to hear one another? Our present moment shares some family resemblance to another moment of profound cultural and political upheaval: the Protestant Reformation.

The splintering of European Christianity might not be the most hopeful reference point. But the Reformation is instructive for a church struggling to gain its bearings in a radically shifting social, religious, and cultural moment. The analogy is not simply about shifts in culture or political power or technology. We share something deeper with 16th-century Europe: a crisis of truth.

For some, the contemporary crisis is that truth seems to be ebbing away, that there is no center anymore. For others, the crisis is the discovery or bold assertion of a truth—that our lives matter—and the recognition that this truth seems sadly contrary

Our new reformation moment is saying fervently that our bodies matter.

to the truths of what “made America great.” At the heart of these two very different understandings lies the same problem: the fragmenting of shared meaning about who we are and what the world is. As we try to imagine a way forward, this problem seems to exacerbate difference and make dialogue impossible.

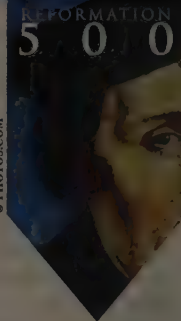
We all have access to the Bible—as well as to interpretations of it, both scholarly and popular, that reinforce what we believe about the world. There is no longer a singular authority to help us parse what scripture has to say about women's ordination, same-sex marriage, race, ecology, abortion, or disability. Each tribe can levy sophisticated tools of interpretation and analysis to ground its understanding of what it means to be Christian in this moment. Knowledge has become radically individualized, tribal; it excavates deep gorges between neighbors.

But at the heart of our divide lies a reformation deeper than questions about how we interpret a particular book. It's about

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who or what can interpret our bodies. Bridging the language gap in our conversations with one another is not about finding a common reading of the Bible, because the Bible isn't the text that's being read, not really. Why is the divorced man still a pastor while the ordained woman waits for a call? Why is the abuser not shunned and shamed but LGBTQ people are? These questions are about bodies—what they're for, what they mean, and who gets to decide.

It's a divide between Vulgate and vernacular. Some read our bodies as the church once read the Latin translation of the Bible: as stable, part of an inherently natural order determined by God. The visible differences of our bodies correlate to a natural purpose, an inherent truth conveyed to me by a priest, who functions as a translator for what my body means in the world.

But what if we are vernacular? What happens when we discover the possibilities of what our bodies mean—when we discover a community of people who interpret our bodies in new ways, who see the image of God in new ways?

The exasperation my neighbor displays when he says, "African American or black or whatever he wants to be called," is the disorientation of a man struggling to adapt to the shifting signs of people asserting their right to name themselves. When this exasperation encounters a movie with mostly dark faces, or two women kissing at the park, or a woman wearing a hijab, it becomes fear and exclusion. And the question of who gets to say what a body is for is not simply a language game; it has consequences. The "bathroom bills" in North Carolina and elsewhere, like earlier legislative attempts to define marriage as between a man and a woman, show how the interpretation of bodies becomes manifest in the kind of community we imagine, the kind of life we hope to share.

The question of our bodied lives together—and whose bodies matter—is not new. But the protests of the past five years, about everything from police brutality to LGBTQ rights, indicate that the question never leaves us. We are confronted with so many differences and so many refusals, in seemingly endless succession. Our bodies do work in the world. They are a book, a language.

And language is more than words and grammar. It is interpretation, the reading of signs. These signs can be words or visual cues, shapes or gestures. Language is that moment when enough people share a reading of how we see and what we say and how we should envision our lives together.

In the digital age, language is radically democratized. Everyone can speak; everyone can interpret. This makes shared meaning difficult to find, as people interpret signs in starkly disparate ways. Social media is often compared to the printing press: it enables people to create and disseminate ideas, to build audiences and followers and schools of thought. This creates an opportunity for new communities to form that resist the "vulgated" reading of our bodies.

During the Protestant Reformation,

the vernacular allowed people to name the incongruities they saw in their lives, as well as to discover new ways of describing God and becoming community. It allowed Christians to see scripture as multiple—and that multiplicity was tied to how communities were shaped, how they lived, and what they looked like. For the reformers, being able to read the Bible in one's own language opened up possibilities of reimagining one's faith, community, and relationship to the world.

In our moment, the issue is no longer the illusion of a common text. The vernacular poses a different question: How can there even be a common reading of a text without first attending to the different bodies that do the reading? Neither Jew nor gentile, slave nor free, male nor female—Paul's words indicate the possibility that our bodies can be read in new ways, that they can begin to carry new meanings into the world.

The reading of bodies is what I have in mind when I say that race is a social construction: I mean not that race isn't real, but that for centuries bodies like mine have been read as dangerous, unwhole, deviant, and unqualified. To say that gender is a spectrum is to acknowledge the very different ways bodies and their gender have been understood over time and in different cultures.

In the face of increasingly vehement calls for diversity in places of power, Donald Trump's presidential campaign rang like a resounding no. "Make America Great Again" evokes cohesion, certainty, and stability. But the slogan also captures what commentator Van Jones referred to on election night as a "whitelash" against Barack Obama's presidency and against the people—black, brown, Asian, and white—crying out for inclusion and equality in American society.

"Make America Great Again" presents an idyllic image of white-defined normalcy—without any call to a particular set of doctrines or beliefs. In the church, if we are to move beyond either/or politics and toward a genuine communal life, we need to realize that the question of interpretation is not just a matter of which texts we read or take as authoritative. What's at stake is the question of what our community looks like, of who is capable of reflecting Christ.

This question of images points to another, haunting parallel between the Reformation and our current moment. While Luther's approach to icons tended toward qualified tolerance,

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other reformers didn't share this attitude. Calvin decried "unseemly representations"; he and others stripped their churches of color and adornments. Andreas Karlstadt and others ransacked churches, destroying paintings and statues, sometimes even defecating on them or placing them in unholy positions to emphasize their idolatry.

The iconoclasm of the Reformation reveals that the social and political upheaval was never limited to disagreements about scripture or doctrine. People understood that their images reflected who they believed themselves to be, what they believed about themselves in the world. The erasure of images in their worship life was a resistance to something deeper: it was a struggle to contain the sensible world in their midst, to press sight and taste and touch into the container of a word. This iconoclasm turned scripture into a treasure chest meant to hold all the meaning of our lives—rather than being a window through which we can see the world and ourselves anew, again and again.

In an American context, in which churches remain deeply divided by race, our gatherings reflect deeply held convictions about what the beloved community ought to look like. We never seem to settle conflicts over who can be in the pulpit, who can teach, who can be married; the debates just become even more knotted. As LGBTQ Christians struggle to speak their lives and bodies into the church, reformation continues.

Like the early church and the first Protestant reformers, they are pressing the question, who is included in this good news? Is it possible that what we thought was true is even wider than we first imagined? Is it possible that we too are the body of Christ?

As our bodies become increasingly vernacular, we are seeing a resurgence of iconoclasts. They don't roam in angry bands, tearing down statues and shredding paintings. But because their Vulgate assumes the stability of our bodies and identities, they obscure or exile these "unseemly representations" from their midst. Their readings have no room for a form of life in which a woman can find intimacy and covenant with another woman, or in which a trans woman is seen as anything but confused about how God made her. It seems these are not bodies or ways of living that can reflect God's image.

My point is not that anything goes or that there are no boundaries. What I am saying is that we cannot even begin to understand what such boundaries might be if we are not speaking the same language—if we do not recognize the historical, social, and theological pressures that form us and how we read scripture, one another, and ourselves.

This is a continual process. I have undergone it as I've worked to reconcile my theology with the lives of friends and students around me. There was a time when I wanted to walk slower on questions of LGBTQ inclusion, to say, "I love you and I see you, but . . ."

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I remember a student saying to me "I see what you have done on questions of racial identity, but I just don't see how you can draw a line between race and sexuality. How can you see race in new ways, but not LGBTQ people?" I gave the theological reasoning that made sense to me at the moment (probably something about particularity and Israel). But the more I thought about her question, the more I realized that I had created a kind of shield around sexuality. Somehow, questions of sexuality were immune from the theological or historical reimaginings that I had been thinking and writing about with regards to race.

As I have read and talked with more people who reflect varied embodiments of gender and sexuality, I have come to realize the beauty and power of the vernacular body. In their readings of themselves and of theology and the Bible I have seen rhythms of faithfulness, rhythms that can be played in different ways and on different instruments. It's becoming increasingly clear to me that these questions can no longer be approached piecemeal, slowly dismantling one exclusion at a time. They are all tied together.

I sit in conversation after conversation with people who are hesitant about Black Lives Matter, or the ordination of women, or LGBTQ inclusion, or diversity in any context—and I realize that we are not speaking the same language because they do not recognize the body as an unfolding text. Unless they see bodies (theirs and ours) in new ways, we will continue to talk in circles.

What kind of communal life will announce the possibility that difference does not have to be silenced and subdued, but can be conjoined in beautiful ways? What kind of “texts” will help us to discover the answer? Is this not the promise of the incarnation—that the Spirit and flesh are not opposed but comingle?

This is our reformation moment, a moment that has already begun but whose sinews are slowly connecting. It is beginning to say more fervently that our bodies matter. It is protesting the confinement and execution of dark people. It is a reformation of what can look like God’s people—a calling to embody communities of difference that, when encountered with new possibilities of faithfulness, respond by reconfiguring their walls and their rooms.

I realize that what I have written here might not be terribly instructive for those seeking practical advice on more fruitful dialogue around race, sexuality, or gender. But I think it is important to start by acknowledging that we won’t get there only by quoting scripture, and we can’t get there by holding on to visions of worship spaces stripped of color and form. We must begin with bodies, our lives together and apart, before we can even begin. Saying so is its own form of protest, a refusal of the heresy that a seemingly orthodox belief can justify another person’s dehumanization.

The op-eds and books, the marches and the new communities—these are our 95 theses. The people filling the streets are words declaring the unfaithfulness of so much that was, and calling us to a new enfleshment of Christ’s freedom. At the heart of this reformation is the centrality of our bodied lives. They are a confession of the beauty, possibility, and wonder that might follow if we were to acknowledge what, ultimately, Jesus lived and died and rose again for: our lives together.



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A story about seeking a new story

Trading in my narrative

by Gordon Atkinson

I COULD TELL YOU the story of how I found Carl in New Orleans, but it wouldn't do you any good. Carl moves his shop whenever the mood strikes him. During a stretch of time in 2008 he operated out of the back of a van. If you need Carl, you'll have to find him in your own way.

In my case, after some years of asking around, I ended up in New Orleans with some sketchy directions scribbled onto a scrap of paper in my wallet. I was supposed to look on St. Ann Street for a green door in a wall that led to an alley.

I walked up and down St. Ann a few times, cursing when I noticed that almost every door is green. Eventually I found it. A narrow wooden door that looked like it was a hundred years old. Behind the door an alley twisted back between buildings and turned to the right. Around the corner was a dimly lit shop called Bayou John's Voodoo Supplies.

I pushed open the door and a little bell tinkled. The man behind the counter looked old. He was working a crossword puzzle and smoking a cigarette that looked like it was rolled out of butcher paper. He squinted at me through the smoke. I spoke to him in an attempt to be friendly.

"You must be Bayou John."

As if he knew I couldn't possibly have anything to do with his world, he said nothing.

I spotted Carl at the back of the store. I brushed aside some dangling beads and walked past a glass case that was filled with ancient bottles. I moved my face closer to get a better look.

"Is that a real skull?" I called back to Bayou John.

He ignored me.

The contrast between Carl's corner and the rest of the store was striking. Carl's part looked more like a doctor's office. There was a well-lit Formica counter. Behind it were shelves that held rows of manila folders with colored tabs. Everything was clean and tidy. Carl was leaning on the counter reading a comic book. He straightened up when he saw me coming.

"My name's Gordon Atkinson. You must be Carl."

He nodded and said, "Nice to meet you. What have you got for me?"

"I've got a custom narrative. I've been working pretty hard on it since about '77, give or take."

"Yeah, well everyone that comes in here says they've got a custom narrative. But keep in mind I do *not* consider a standard narrative package with a couple of store-bought modules snapped onto the side to be a custom deal. Let me see what you've got."

I slid my folder over to him. He whistled.

"Nice. This is a classic '70s cover. Is this all original work?"

"Yep. I did the lettering myself. I was planning on continued custom work until I was maybe in my seventies. I figured after that I'd just settle down and live in it, you know?"

Carl opened the folder and began turning the pages.

"I like the script you were using in the '80s. You'd have been twentysomething back then, right?"

"I was. Yes."

"Such hopeful lettering. I can see the doubt creeping in during the '90s."

He ran his finger a few lines down a page and tapped it twice.

Lately the whole idea of American Christianity is wearing thin.

"Yeah, I see the breaking point right here. Based on a quick and cursory handwriting analysis, I'd say you were pretty well screwed by 2007."

He flipped quickly through the pages to the end, rubbed the sheets between his thumb and forefinger, smelled the paper, then turned back to the first page.

"Classic. A Texas Baptist starter package. Golden years, too. Pre-'79. That whole thing went south after 1980."

"Don't I know it."

"Were your parents true believers or were they in it for other reasons?"

"No. True believers. Check their numbers."

"Wow! Your dad scored a 94?"

"I know. That's a legit score too. I saw his numbers. And he's clergy."

Carl looked up at me and smiled, then dropped his eyes back to the folder. He shook his head and grunted.

"A clerical true believer!"

He flipped through a few more pages.

"Such a loving father. And strict. Please tell me he still believes."

"Oh yeah. In his seventies. Married. Still in love with Mom."

Gordon Atkinson writes and lives in San Antonio. His novel Foy: On the Road to Lost is available from Material Media.

Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life. God's in his heaven and all's right with the world. Showers of blessing all around. Never wavered. Never will."

"I get some clergy narratives sometimes from true believers. But if you dig around you'll generally find a pragmatic base. Like a false bottom. They wouldn't score anywhere near a 94."

Carl closed the folder and looked at me over the counter. "So, full childhood immersion in an organic faith narrative bequeathed by true believers. I'll look it over. Leave it with me and come back in a week."

"OK. And you'll be able to tell me what it's worth? Or what I could get for it on a trade in?"

Carl didn't look up. He kept skimming through the pages. "I'll tell you what you need to be told."

I was feeling pretty good when I left. Feeling kind of proud about the work I'd done on my narrative. Feeling like I might get enough for it to get me started with a whole new story. I passed Bayou John on the way out and said, "See you next week."

He moved his hand slowly to his mouth, pulled his cigarette out and held it a couple of inches from his lips.

"Listen here. I rent part of my shop to Carl 'cause I need the money. But I ain't got nuthin' to do with y'all tellin' your little stories and playin' pussyfoot with each other at the back of my store."

I looked back at Carl. He closed his eyes and shook his head. I got the message. Best not to say all that much to Bayou John.

I spent the week wandering around the city, smoking cigars, drinking bourbon, and watching people. It was one of the best weeks of my life.

When I returned to the voodoo shop, I tiptoed past Bayou John. He looked at me through a cloud of cigarette smoke but didn't say anything. Carl came out from around his counter.

"Gordon, welcome back. Good to see you. Let's go into my office."

He led me around his counter and through a dark green velvet curtain into a small room. There was a round table with three chairs around it. My narrative folder was sitting on the table.

Carl motioned to the table, so I sat down. He opened my folder and flipped a couple of pages back and forth.

"So. This is a very interesting narrative you have here. I've got a few questions, as you might imagine."

"Ask away."

"I'll cut to the chase. You're basically an agnostic."

"Yes."

"And while you love metaphysical discussions about God and the meaning of life, at your core you're an empiricist."

"I think that's right."

"You talk a lot about faith and trust and spirituality, but if I put you under stress, you're going to trust what you see with your eyes."

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"Yes."

"So you're an agnostic empiricist."

"I am. Yes."

Carl stared into my eyes for about ten seconds. I didn't look away. He looked down at the folder and turned a couple of pages. He spoke again without looking up.

"And a Baptist preacher."

"Well, was a Baptist preacher. I left that gig four years ago."

"But you were an agnostic empirical Baptist preacher for 20 years."

"Yes. I was."

Carl tapped his index finger a few times on the folder.

"This narrative is a work of art. It's your grafts that fascinate me the most. Several strong philosophical scions budded beautifully into your family's Baptist stock. Your bindings are secure as hell too. But how did they last for 20 years? I've seen some lies and con jobs last that long, but never an honest graft. How'd you keep from going crazy?"

"Are you referring to Jung's First Law?"

"Yes. Exactly."

"Check the footnotes for my inclusion of Jung and Campbell entering the story in the late '90s. See how that dovetail supports the central narrative?"

"Joseph Campbell?"

I smiled.

"Now"

The Dalai Lama shaves I imagine as other men do each morning. Standing before his mirror, he sees the line of lamas going back to before mirrors. When he shaves he's present only to the blade as it pulls or skates across his skin—cheek, upper lip, chin—and to each hair as it accepts the fact. Shaving, he only shaves, unlike me reclining in this tub, absent to the razor in my hand and to the shin, lost in thoughts of how wise men live.

Kate Tucker

"Will Campbell."

"Ah yes, the hard-drinking, country Baptist prophet himself."

Carl ran his finger down to the footnote, flipped two pages, read a bit, then flipped back. He shook his head.

"Nice. That's a nice fit. So you get Campbell's strong social conscience running through there. That's basically a sustaining ritual. Hell, that's as good as a secondary graft."

I nodded. "Yeah. I kind of lucked into it. Didn't know what I was doing. But anyway, it held together."

Carl closed the folder.

"It did. For a time. But you and I both know there's no way around Jung's First Law of the True Believer."

"Yeah. But I found a most unexpected loophole. I think it gave me maybe five extra years."

"What's that?"

"I owned it. Publicly. The agnosticism, the doubts, the anger. Hell, let's admit it, the heresy. I started a blog."

"Why didn't the church fire you?"

"Love. They loved me. And I loved them. I'd been there a long time. I think they saw the writing as personal therapy or at least something I needed for reasons they didn't have to understand. And I'm sure there was a little denial on their part and mine too."

"Fascinating. And very rare. You stayed pretty healthy too. There was that bout of depression in '06, but that could have been anything."

"It all held pretty well until about 2008. By 2009 I knew it was over. I was so tired. I didn't have anything left."

"That's what Jung postulated. Eventually you run out of gas. You can play all the tricks you want, but you can't get around the First Law: clerics who are not true believers will either be charlatans or become emotionally unstable."

"He was right. So I left in 2010 on good terms, before I went crazy. I found another job and have never looked back."

"Have you considered the classic Baptist to Anglican move? Like Claypool? They certainly have room for your agnosticism. And the ritual plays well with your Jungian themes."

"As a matter of fact, I was confirmed into the Episcopal Church in 2012. But I don't know. Lately the whole idea of American Christianity is wearing thin. I don't have the patience. I can't hear anything. Church talk is unintelligible to me now. Like they're speaking another language. So I was thinking maybe just chuck the whole thing and find something new."

"That's why I came to you. I'm hoping to sell this narrative and get enough to buy a new story. Just start over."

Carl was silent for a long time. I leaned over the table toward him.

"My story's not worth that much, is it? I wouldn't get enough for it to get me into something new?"

"Oh hell no. This is a very, very nice narrative. I know several collectors who would pay top dollar for it just to get a peek at your quirky structures, your grafts and bindings. And I think you've stumbled upon a bona fide Tertium Quid with your clerical confession of doubt. I mean you can't get around the First Law, but you definitely found a third way and bought yourself some time. No, I could sell it. That's not the problem."

"Then what is the problem?"

"You're the problem."

"What do you mean?"

"How old are you?"

"Fifty-two."

"Well, that's pretty old to be starting with a new narrative, don't you think? Look, even the standard worldview packages take 20 years or more to break them in. And I'm pretty sure you aren't going to be happy with a standard package. So then we're talking about customizing. I just don't think you've got the time. And even if you do work out something cool for yourself, at your age it won't really take root. It's just gonna be a kind of mythic costume you walk around in. You sure you want that?"

"I guess I thought maybe I'd buy someone else's custom narrative. Maybe a cool Christian Buddhist like Merton or a social activist Quaker who's an amazing bowler and lives in a small town where he's the only liberal but people love him anyway. Something like that."

"You don't understand. Collectors buy these narratives. Not people hoping to use them. You can't just move into someone else's story like a hermit crab switching shells. Custom narratives are like used shoes. They look comfortable as hell, but when you put them on they don't fit your feet."

"Well, what do people like me do when they trade in their narratives?"

"They don't trade them in, OK? I get these from dead people. I buy them from families of the deceased or at estate sales. I sell them to collectors or sometimes to writers who use them to develop characters. That's how this business works. I could sell you one of the custom narratives I've got in stock. But I'd just be taking your money. You aren't going to be able to use it."

"Well, then I guess just give me one of your standard narrative packages. What have you got?"

Carl looked at me for a few moments. He started to say something but didn't. Then he shrugged and left the room through the curtain. He came back with a notebook computer that he put on the table and opened. The light from the screen lit up his face. He tapped on the keys a few times and pushed his finger around on the track pad.

"I keep a selection of these on hand. You can pick them up pretty much anywhere. They're moneymakers. What can I say? People swap them out all the time. Most of them come with preloaded geographic settings. We just plug in your zip code and the software makes all the adjustments."

He clicked a few more times on the keyboard.

"I've got some typical right-leaning, evangelical, small-town, married-with-

kids narratives. Bowling league, friends for life, with an assortment of hobbies and weekend entertainment modules already installed. Got a number of those.

"Got some granola packages. Pretty much what you'd expect—overeducated, politically correct, vegetarian or vegan, cause-oriented crusader packages. Again, the specific causes and some of the details depend on your zip code.

"I've got some bandana-wearing, weekend-motorcycle-riding, generic-American-godism narratives. Slogan-oriented patriotism modules as add-ons. These come in both right- and left-wing political versions.

"You might want to look into one of the religious patriot packages that are all the rage these days. Your god and government are the good guys. Your enemies' gods and governments cast as agents of Satan. What's cool about these packages is they come as stand-alone mythic narratives or you can treat them as modules. You can snap them on the side of pretty much any standard package. Then you can tear around town not doing shit for god or country but making a helluva lot of noise. These are especially nice if you're hoping to run for office."

We stared at each other across the table for a few seconds. Carl shrugged.

"I don't want to hear any more."

He closed his computer.

"Look, man, they're basic starter packages, OK? It's what we all begin with. Where do you think that 1960s Southern

WHATEVER YOU DO

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I leaned forward and placed my face in my hands and ground the base of my palms into my eyes. Then I slipped my palms up to my temples and rubbed them in circles.

"So what you're saying is I can't use someone else's custom narrative. My choice is to keep the one I have or start new with one of these horrible, culture-friendly starter packages. Those are my choices."

"Yes. Those are the only two choices. Well, the only two choices that make sense to most people. But sometimes, when it seems there are only two ways to go and things are getting desperate, a third way opens itself to our awareness. Your old narrative showed that you were open to that kind of thing. The Tertium Quid."

"Have you got one in mind?"

"As a matter of fact I do. I'll take your narrative and keep it here for you. I won't sell it. It will be here in case you come back someday to reclaim it."

"What am I supposed to do?"

"I'm casting you out into the Negev. Like Abram you will

journey by stages into the wilderness. You will have no narrative. No story will be your story. You will be an observer of humanity but will exist yourself in a kind of twilight state. You will walk in this third way until you find truth or until the end of your days."

I closed my eyes and slowly moved my head back and forth.

"Look, Gordon, it's not a punishment. Think of it as an extended Lenten period. For goodness sakes, Jesus did it. He went into the wilderness. And in spite of your current attitude toward your old story, I have to think you still have a soft spot in your heart for Jesus."

I started crying. There was no stopping it. I felt ashamed and put my face in my hands.

Carl got a box of Kleenex from the top of the fridge and handed them to me. I wiped my eyes and blew my nose. Then I took a deep breath and nodded.

"OK. But where should I go? How should I get started? Are there others like me out there?"

Carl didn't say anything. He gathered up my folder and slid it into a fat manila envelope and sealed it with one of those little strings that wraps around a button. Then he left through the green curtain. He didn't come back. I went out and he was talking on the phone to someone. He glanced at me and then turned away. I knew it was time to leave.

I walked through the shop toward the door. Bayou John was not in his usual place. I found him outside sitting on a stump with a cat in his arms, smoking a pipe. I stood in the doorway, wondering which way to go.

"Let me see your eyes," Bayou John said.

I looked at him. He focused first on my right eye and then slid his view across my nose to my left eye.

"Give me your hands."

I held my hands out. He grabbed them and turned them palm upward. He looked carefully at them for a few moments.

"Did he cast you out?"

"Yes."


He grunted and puffed on his pipe. I said, "I thought you didn't like me. You certainly weren't that friendly the last time I was here."

"That time your story was not my story. Now you are a man with no story. You might end up anywhere. Even back here with me."

"Voodoo?"

"Maybe. Maybe not. Voodoo is hot and wet. I think maybe you are a cold and dry man in your soul."

I thought about what he said but couldn't make sense of it. I said, "I don't know where to start, which way to go."

"That's easy. You leave here and go down to the river. Every journey starts at the river. Every good thing comes to you when you find the deep waters." 



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Faith MATTERS

by Samuel Wells

How evils wins

IF THE FIRST casualty of war is truth, perhaps the first casualty of political disappointment is a sense of proportion. If people had been in the habit of sending Christmas circular letters in 1917 or 1942, they could hardly have begun with a gloomier first paragraph than the ones I received from the United States and the United Kingdom at the end of last year.

Looking for balance between what's wrong and what could be a lot worse, I decided to visit Auschwitz-Birkenau in January.

Auschwitz is the epitome of World War II. It was originally a Polish military camp. When western Poland was annexed by Germany, Auschwitz became an internment camp for Polish elites and political prisoners. When the Final Solution was decided upon and the extinction of European Jewry was planned in earnest, the camp began to kill people in two ways: a minority worked in hideous conditions until they dropped dead—after around two months in most cases. The majority, 700 at a time, went to the gas chamber. Five other extermination camps were opened, all in what had been western Poland, but Auschwitz was overstretched, so a second camp, Auschwitz-Birkenau, opened two miles away. Each of its four gas chambers could kill 2,000 people at a time. Railroads brought people in overcrowded carriages right into the camp. When the train emptied, 20 percent of the occupants were directed to the workers' quarters, and the rest walked half a mile down the platform and into the gas chambers.

The scale of the project is breathtaking (World War II had plenty of big numbers). Around 1.3 million people died at Auschwitz. Another 3.7 million died at five other death camps, and another 2 million Jews were killed in other ways. More disturbing even than the scale of the atrocity is the planning. Up to 90,000 people inhabited Auschwitz-Birkenau at any one time, and another 20,000 were kept at the original camp. The organization and the detail in the record keeping are remarkable. Cruelty was matched only by efficiency: Jews were told they could bring 25 kilograms of goods to help them start their new life in the East, but their baggage was looted shortly after they discovered the horrifying truth of where they had arrived. Even the hairs on their head were preserved for the war effort. Their gold teeth were extracted, and the ashes of their incinerated bodies fertilized the fields.

I had often wondered why Nazis used gas to achieve their grisly purposes. After visiting the camp, I knew: by giving every prisoner a number, the inmates were dehumanized; by killing them in a sealed chamber, the murderers did not have to watch their victims die, still less meet their eyes; and by using chemicals, the bodies could be disposed of relatively straightforward-

ly despite the enormous numbers. If soldiers had simply machine-gunned people in the ghettos, none of these things would have been the case.

People often quote political commentator Edmund Burke in his letter to Thomas Mercer: "The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing." His words are widely taken as a call to activism. But the lesson of Auschwitz is that if one is to achieve good, one must work with even greater attention to detail than those who devise evil. We may blithely say, "I ain't gonna study war no more," but what we really need to do is to study peace a lot harder than those who are studying war.

Burke knew this:

Whilst [people] are linked together, they easily and speedily communicate the alarm of any evil design. They are enabled to fathom it with common counsel, and to oppose it with united strength. Whereas, when they lie dispersed, without concert, order, or discipline, communication is uncertain, counsel difficult, and resistance impracticable. Where [people] are not acquainted with each other's principles, nor experienced in each other's talents, nor at all practised in their mutual habitudes and dispositions by joint efforts in business; no personal confidence, no friendship, no common interest, subsisting among them; it is evidently impossible that they can act a public part with uniformity, perseverance, or efficacy. . . . When bad [people] combine, the good must associate; else they will fall, one by one, an unpitied sacrifice in a contemptible struggle.

Popular images of desultory social forces today focus on unpleasant sound bites, demeaning remarks, outrageous tweets, and intolerant attitudes. But the Holocaust was about exhaustive preparation, painstaking detail, and astonishing organization. There was nothing reckless, narcissistic, or cavalier about it.

Burke's words could appropriately be sent to anyone who thinks one can be a Christian without the church, a right-thinker without political association, a Christmas-letter lamenter without sustained coalition building with friend and stranger. If good people are to triumph over evil, they must never underestimate the energy of their enemies. They must rely not simply on the rightness of their cause or the faithfulness of their implementation, but on the relentlessness of detailed planning.

Samuel Wells is the vicar of St. Martin-in-the-Fields in London.

IN Review

What makes a family?

by Thomas D. Kennedy

While having breakfast at a hotel recently I overheard a couple, apparently a little older than most of their parent-peers, commenting to the breakfast manager on their young twin boys, who were making a mess, “We always wanted children, and now here we are.” It struck me how commonplace and ordinary the conversation about forming families through some means other than sex seemed.

Around 135,000 children are adopted in the United States every year; around 64,000 births are conceived through use of assisted reproductive technologies. Given these numbers, there was nothing particularly surprising about the couple’s openness about their children not being biologically theirs.

But a second thought also occurred to me. The couple spoke of their children and their desire for children much as I might speak about a car: “Well, I’ve always wanted a Tesla, and last month I finally got my Model S, and now here we are.” Again, this way of speaking about children is not unusual. No doubt it’s the same way my wife and I spoke about our nascent family some 30 years ago.

Having children and forming families is, as Oxford theological ethicist Michael Banner has put it, part of “the ethics of everyday life.” It’s one of the basic practices that give shape and meaning to human life. Lutheran ethicist Gilbert Meilaender is interested in how such practices may or may not cohere with God’s creative, sustaining, and redemptive activity.

Meilaender locates questions of family and adoption within the larger theological and ethical question of the relation of nature and history. Meilaender points out that most people’s ordinary beliefs about the importance of nature are incoherent.

We think nature matters, and matters very much—except when we don’t. Sometimes we think nature determines our identity. At other times, we think we should transcend natural identities. When it comes to racial identity, for example, we think that nature should be respected and that we should not pretend an identity untrue to nature. But when it comes to national identity (and, perhaps, gender identity) we think our natural origin is a mere accident, of no more consequence than we choose to grant it.

How does nature matter when it comes to practices of forming families? Meilaender proposes that we start with the biblical teaching of *huiothesia*, or adoption. As Ephesians 1:5 has it, we have been destined in love for adoption, for a relation to God that is not given by nature but is given only in redemptive history, a “history that does not ignore the significance of our created nature, but [that] also sees us as people on the way toward the greater destiny of God’s new creation.”

Meilaender appeals to Karl Barth in understanding the complexity of redemptive history and God’s threefold action in creation, reconciliation, and redemption. We go wrong, he argues, when we isolate any particular point in creation, reconciliation, and redemption and treat it as fully determinative.

Looked at from the perspective only of creation, adoptive families can appear at most as second best, lacking an origin in the biological relation of husband and wife. But when viewed from the more complex perspective of reconciliation and redemption as well as creation, natural kinship is displaced and relativized.

In baptism, the church proclaims that “the baptized person is destined for a greater family than the one into which he was born—a destiny that comes not

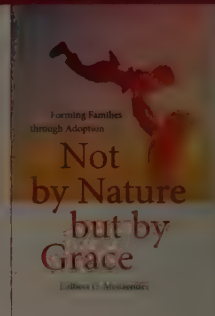
through natural bonds but through *huiothesia*. Hence, all Christian parents must relinquish their children for adoption [in baptism], and we are (one and all) adoptees.” In biological and adoptive families, God provides for children “a place of belonging—a place that looks back to the created good of the family, a place that offers an intimation of the redeemed community promised by God.”

Meilaender’s wrestling with nature and history throughout this short work is deft. He is provocative in pointing out how Christian ways of thinking about the family may be at odds not only with secular culture but with other theistic faiths.

Adoption is a complicated issue in both Islam and Judaism, and neither tradition regards adoptive ties as on a parity with blood ties. While not discouraged in Islam, adoption establishes no new relationship that rivals the blood tie. History, as Meilaender puts it, cannot efface nature. In Judaism, the most important question in thinking about the relation of nature and history is that of Jewish identity, an identity established by biology much more fundamentally than by history (although a Jewish identity may be achieved through conversion). Both Islam and Judaism share with Christianity a resistance to viewing children as products.

Meilaender punctuates and illuminates

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Not by Nature but by Grace: Forming Families through Adoption

By Gilbert C. Meilaender
University of Notre Dame Press,
136 pp., \$25.00

his theological discussion of adoption with a series of four lovely letters to his son, Derek, which were published in the *CENTURY* in 2003. He addresses not only practical questions of adoption—adoption by single and same-sex parents, transnational adoption, and transracial adoption—but also assisted reproductive technologies and embryo adoption, neither of which is unproblematic, according to Meilaender. The best interests of the child, not the parents, should always guide our decisions in these hard cases, he argues.

Meilaender holds a traditional, Catholic view of same-sex marriage. For him, adoption by same-sex couples will force an unacceptable division in “the child’s loyalties.” The child will be called upon to love those who care for him while rejecting their way of life. That problem is not present in the same way in single-parent adoptions, but the absence of the complementarity of male and female makes single adoption less desirable than adoption by a husband and wife.

If a family is formed not by nature or biological ties but by a grateful embrace and welcoming of another, we might conclude that we should invite and welcome those whose creation is assisted by new reproductive technologies. Not so, Meilaender maintains. The problem he identifies here is the severing of the relational and procreative goods of marriage that occurs when donor gametes are used in assisted reproduction. The conceived child inevitably becomes a product, not a gift, a product subject to the same quality control considerations we normally apply to things we exchange and consume. In this case, Meilaender contends, parents inescapably come to see children as less than and different from an expression and fruit of self-giving love. In the process, marriage itself is misunderstood and devalued.

Since he believes that a human life worthy of respect and protection is present at conception, one might expect Meilaender to be a hearty supporter of embryo adoption (even if he does not think new embryos should be created with donor gametes). Not so. Given the equal claims upon us of frozen embryos and the millions of orphans who are spread throughout the world, Meilaender argues that our priority should be the orphans. This priority is established by the harms

those children will experience if they are not welcomed into families—harms that frozen embryos cannot experience. This claim is surprising since Meilaender does not believe that an individual’s dignity and worth is a matter of consciousness, based on what he or she can experience. I agree with Meilaender that, all things being equal, we have greater obligations to orphans than to frozen embryos. But I question whether he offers a compelling explanation of why this is the case.

Meilaender’s guiding assumption is that nature makes claims upon us that should never be denied even as they are “markedly qualified.” The denial of the claims of nature is a part of the everyday ethics of almost all individuals in the developed world from adolescence on. We interfere with nature in using artificial methods of birth control, for example. Christians may take this to be not a denial of nature, but rather an appropriate transcending of it: a looking back at the created good of the family with a constrained openness to a limited intimation of the redeemed community promised by God.

Most Americans are unlikely to understand why it is even important to talk about tension between the claims of nature and the claims of history. When they do engage in such talk, it is generally in the context of conversations about global climate change and environmental issues.

Meilaender speaks about these issues only on the scale of individual family units. That is no fault; no book can do everything. But readers may wonder about the implications of Meilaender’s robust Christian affirmation of adoption and the good of family for national policies. How might Christians speak to power given these affirmations?

As Meilaender points out, current estimates are that, worldwide, 17–18 million children are orphans. What should that mean for Christians who, like Meilaender, want to understand children and families in the light of redemptive history? What do we do and ask others to do? What should our affirmation of the good of adoption and family mean not only for our personal lives, but for our public witness? Meilaender’s fine and accessible book is an important start in thinking about forming families and the implications of our commitment to them.



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Ruined

By Ruth Everhart
Tyndale, 336 pp.,
\$14.99 paperback

Ruth Everhart's memoir is prefaced by a publisher's note warning that the book may offend because it includes violent events and vulgar language. I confess that as I read this, I chuckled darkly. It seemed unnecessarily apologetic. As the back of the book reveals, it's the story of the night in Everhart's senior year of college when two armed assailants broke into her college apartment and raped her and her roommates at gunpoint. The least a reader can do, in response to the critical witness Everhart provides, is to shift uncomfortably in her seat.

As it happens, Everhart is a careful narrator. There is nothing salacious about her telling of the events of that night or the process of grief, fear, and re-orientation that followed them. The experience of reading her story is difficult, but there are no unnecessary details: this is neither a true-crime novel nor a sensational tabloid report.

Though the statistics were different in 1978 when the crime was committed, the sexual violence Everhart reports was unusual even for that time. She and her apartment mates were "perfect victims." No one could have suggested that alcohol consumption or anything about their attire "contributed" to their assault: they were home, asleep. Everhart wore a long, flannel nightgown. This crime was also unusual in its randomness. A 2014 study by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported that the vast majority of victims of sexual assault know their rapist; rapes by strangers make up only 12.9 percent of those reported.

Also unusual is that the perpetrators were caught, tried, and convicted. Those attuned to American history may wonder if the police and court system's successes are related to the fact that the perpetrators were black men—"clowns" in the odd word choice of the women's ER doctor—and the victims were white Christian women.

Everhart would not think us cynical for wondering; she wonders herself. And it is her wondering—about race and guilt, shame and suffering, injustice and the goodness of God—that renders this book profoundly important.

Everhart grew up in the Dutch Reformed Church, as deeply situated in the theological universe of her community as a person can be. She was educated in Dutch Reformed schools, and her parents taught in those same schools. She wrote papers on Christian doctrine in high school; she has clear memories of pastors and sanctuaries from her earliest days. Theological questions and convictions shaped her personal experience and community life. Her story is unusual in this sense as well.

Following the break-in and rape, she felt anger, shame, and fear. She also struggled mightily with the Calvinist faith of her childhood, which taught the absolute sovereignty of God. Nothing happens outside of God's will. So why, then, had her life been ruined? Why had she and her friends suffered so?

People have always been tempted to answer the questions of those who grieve with responses of blame: you must have done something. This was true in the time of Job, and it's still true today. Forty years ago, a traumatized Everhart wondered if there had been something in her past that rendered her marred, deserving of such divine retribution. Worse still was the stigma attached to the sexual nature of the crime: the housemates wondered at first if they should tell anyone, or if that would make it worse. Everyone would know of their ruination and might wonder, too, about their complicity.

Even more startling to Everhart was the conviction pervading the theological air she breathed that this violent rape must have been of God: all things are of God; all things can be used by God. A budding theologian, newly suffering, she could no longer accept this proposition.

Though many mainline Christians don't believe in God's sovereignty in that sense, our churches are not above victim-blaming: witness the tension

around speaking of Michael Brown (or any number of others), the survivor in the Brock Turner case, or those who find themselves living in poverty. We're a lot more prone to works righteousness—or just blindness to our privilege—than we'd like to admit.

Indeed, this is the morally complex ground Everhart occupies: the “perfect” victims are assaulted by young black men. In telling the story with a vividness intended to locate readers in the moment, she uses dialect; she focuses on the details of her attackers which, as it happens, are some of those stereotypically associated with black men living in poor neighborhoods in the 1970s. Though she has an ear for dialogue and an eye for detail, one might ask: Does this depiction do more harm than good?

Ultimately, Everhart takes up the question of how this event made her fearful of racial difference in a reflexive way that challenged her more liberal sensibilities. And then she seeks reconciliation, joining a multiracial church and participating in other forms of justice work. She retrains herself so that her reflexes reflect the love of God for all people, realizing that this must be a critical part of her healing.

Though the context of Everhart's rape and its racial dynamics are unusual, the fact of it is not. Approximately one in five American women will be raped or otherwise sexually assaulted in their lifetime; the risk is even higher within some demographics. This reality is reason enough for clergy to read this book: Everhart's reflection on the theological meaning of her suffering will surely assist them in ministering to survivors of sexual assault. The myriad ways in which police, doctors, professors, clergy, and campus pastors fail Everhart and her friends are instructive.

As a pastor, I return constantly to what Paul Tillich called “the riddle of inequality,” which “our finite minds cannot solve.” How is it that some have so much and others so little? How is it that

suffering is so often compounded, and blessing appears to aggregate?

Everhart never solves the riddle, but she seeks and receives healing—perhaps, as Tillich suggests, through “the certainty of divine participations” which “gives us the courage to endure.” The college student who angrily rejects Calvin eventually becomes a Presbyterian pastor.

Ruined is a triumph of meaning making over the disintegrating forces of violence and sin, even as it illumines our continued participation in rape culture and our continued need for work for racial justice. Everhart offers a prophetic word for all who encounter trauma, and a necessary pastoral one: *Remember that you are infinitely precious, no matter what happened to you.*

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Reviewed by Bromleigh McCleneghan, who is
associate minister of Union Church of Hinsdale
in Illinois and the author of *Good Christian Sex* (HarperOne).

The Many Captivities of Esther Wheelwright

By Ann M. Little

Yale University Press, 304 pp., \$40.00

An offhand remark can change everything. I still remember a graduate school professor's consternation at the idea of "women's history." "They don't *do* anything," he protested. The

comment passed without notice in a room full of male professors and students, but it took up permanent residence in my head. I was hooked, not just by his attitude problem but by the nagging reality that in the categories this well-regarded historian recognized—wars and politics and all that—he was right.

Writing women into history isn't easy. It's one thing to add an occasional sidebar in a textbook or praise a heroine

whose brave exception proves the rule, but that doesn't change the overall story line. The narrative still belongs to men who "do things," driving the engines of change by waging wars and winning elections.

Ann M. Little, who teaches history at Colorado State University, has taken on this challenge. Her massively and meticulously researched biography of Esther Wheelwright—born of Puritan stock, then Wabanaki captive, and finally French Catholic nun—is a story of politics and war in 18th-century North America, with women at the center. Much of the landscape is familiar: conflicts between colonial powers and cycles of frontier violence. But ultimately this is a story of one woman and, more importantly, the communities of women and girls "who surrounded her at every stage of her life," Congregationalist, Wabanaki, and Ursuline.

Little reconstructs Wheelwright's life mostly from offhand sources, often forced to rely on tantalizingly brief references in official accounts. Even so, the story is gripping.

Esther was only seven years old when she was taken from her frontier New England homestead in a Wabanaki raid and forced-marched through miles of wilderness. Though the specifics are elusive, we know from other surviving accounts that Esther's new female relatives would have dressed her in deer-skin and broadcloth and given her a new name. The likely possibility is "Mali," the Wabanaki pronunciation of Marie. She also became a Roman Catholic. Jesuit missionaries had begun evangelizing the tribe in the late 17th century, but her tutors would have been other women. "After all," Little writes, "it was they who were the experts in turning strangers into kin."

Esther's life took another dramatic turn five years later, when the Jesuit missionaries brought her to Quebec and enrolled her in an Ursuline school. It's unclear whether her Wabanaki family voluntarily relinquished her or died of disease or famine—not unlikely during those violent times. Even murkier, Esther apparently skirted French and English prisoner exchange laws that

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required the return of children under the age of 12. Clearly, however, she flourished in her new surroundings. In 1713, "Esther Anglaise," as she appeared in the school roster, entered the order as a novitiate. Taking on yet another name and another set of clothes, she reemerged as Sister Marie-Joseph de l'Enfant Jésus, now swathed in a long black mantle and white veil.

The story does not end there. This war captive, so poor that the Ursulines partially waived the financial requirement for her acceptance into the order, became mother superior of the convent in 1760. A portrait she likely commissioned herself, now hanging in the Massachusetts Historical Society, shows a woman fully in control of her circumstances, her serene expression radiating sober judgment and spiritual conviction.

But this is no simple success story. Wheelwright's life, as Little reconstructs it, was a series of different "captivities," not just as kidnapping victim and cloistered nun but as a woman in colonial society. On the morning of her capture, Esther would have been laced into stays, a corset-like apparatus that held her torso stiffly upright. As a Wabanaki, she had to master complex protocols governing everything from sex-segregated labor to who slept closest to the fire. As an Ursuline, she wore a habit that slowed her movements and narrowed her field of vision while she followed an unalterable routine of work and prayer.

Yet this is no tragedy either. Though Wheelwright's life "may look like a great deal like captivity to modern, secular readers," it was not, as Little explains, that different from what most of us still experience: a successive interplay of choice and circumstance. The history textbook heroine, self-actualizing against all odds, is true to neither the complexities of the past nor those of the present. The "often porous boundaries between liberty and constraint, freedom and captivity" persist.

Reviewed by Margaret Bendroth, executive director of the Congregational Library and Archives and author of The Last Puritans (University of North Carolina Press).

In fact, most women's biographies do not follow a simple trajectory like those of the Founding Fathers' grand march through history. For one thing, as Wheelwright's story demonstrates, the historical source material is most plentiful at the beginning and end of life, in birth and obituary records. Like many other women of the past, Wheelwright left few personal clues behind: no journal, no diary, no brilliant correspondence with an admiring associate. Little's ingenuity at reconstructing Wheelwright's daily life is often astonishing—she can tell us what she would have eaten for breakfast at the convent or the weather on a given day. Yet no amount of careful research can tell us how this intriguing woman felt or what she believed. The records simply do not exist: Wheelwright's interior life is forever inaccessible.

This is not Little's fault, of course, but readers do feel the loss. Certainly this tenacious, perhaps brilliant woman wrestled with ideas, especially theological ones. For all Little's careful attention to Wabanaki cosmologies and Catholic piety, she delves only briefly into Wheelwright's Puritan intellectual inheritance, which would have given the captive plenty to think about as she crossed repeatedly into alien religious and cultural territory. We can never know how Wheelwright made moral sense of things, but readers might wish Little had explored that topic more than she does. In our own disjointed times, they might find Wheelwright's 18th-century life both odd and achingly familiar.

The Sport of Kings: A Novel

By C. E. Morgan
Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 560 pp., \$27.00

The sport "exists on mystique," John Jeremiah Sullivan writes in *Blood Horses*, his memoir and amateur history of horse racing. "If you want a sport of kings in a democracy, you must somehow find a kingdom. . . . Its cult obtains up and down the class ladder," he continues.

Morgan is a native of Kentucky—she has boomeranged back to her home state after a stint at Harvard Divinity School—so she didn't have to look far for that kingdom. *The Sport of Kings* is Faulknerian in its saga of one white family in one place who is facing the reality that its tree must branch if the family wishes to survive. Faulkner's Mississippi is now Kentucky; his Compsons are now Morgan's Forges; and Benjy's fragmented narrative parts are now interludes after each long chapter that may be dreams, scientific jargon, or technical details from jockey manuals.

But mapping Morgan's book onto *The Sound and the Fury* doesn't grant either book the singularity it deserves. While Faulkner chronicles the history of the Compsons primarily by means of their interpersonal affairs, Morgan intro-

Reviewed by Win Bassett, who is a writer and editor-at-large for the Sewanee Review. He lives in Nashville, where he teaches and coaches at a boys' school.

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duces an intermediary—the business, corruption, wealth, romance, heartache, and sport of racing horses—that absorbs her characters' thoughts, emotions, and actions. In the South, one learns not to talk about money, sex, politics, and religion. In Morgan's kingdom, anything goes as long as it's couched in the language of the equine.

The novel traces the ancestry of Henry Forge, patriarch of a storied and well-to-do family in Kentucky and in horse racing. He loses his wife for many reasons—some due to him and some due to her—and finds himself raising a single daughter, Henrietta. (Henry's granting her the feminized version of his own name comes as no surprise.) She grows up to become a tomboy with a carnal passion for men that she can barely rein in.

The likenesses to the animal kingdom don't stop here. Like Sullivan's anecdotal history of horse racing, Morgan's book

weaves in enough facts about horse ancestry, care, training, and racing for even the most uninformed reader to speak knowledgeably during the next Kentucky Derby. One practice involves inbreeding race horses to maintain a line's best qualities—speed and stamina. The Forges also like to preserve their family's "heritage."

The largest threat to their blue blood, as it was in Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha kingdom, is the mixing of it with African-American blood. Race tracks remained segregated in Kentucky "well into the 1950s," writes Sullivan, which remains interesting but not surprising "for a sport with a history . . . of devoted and skillful black grooms." Morgan inserts one particularly skillful black groom into Henry Forge's naive and blind white wonderland—with the help of Henrietta and her lustful adolescent rebelling.

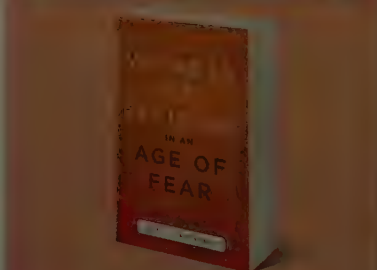
The licentious liaisons evolve, however, into that other "I" word, only for Henrietta to learn that this highest of virtues still will not release her from her deep-seated Forge roots.

Did she actually think that love offered some kind of escape? There is kingdom, class order, family, genus, species. You could step out of your heels, walk backward along the hall, recede from their collective gaze, but you could never escape the category of your birth and all the morphological categories which precede it.

This passage about Henrietta falls a little more than halfway through the novel, and I noted in the margin during my first reading of it that Morgan's epic, like all epics, is a love story.

Horses mediate this particular love story, and Morgan uses her mares and stallions deftly to control her readers' yearning for redemption—in sport, in love, and in life—so that one never feels halted in traversing her tome. In an interview with her publisher, Morgan stated, "[A] couple of people have said that they cried over particular characters and scenes. I would hope that there's something that comes after the crying." This novel shows that there always is.

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Tired of Apologizing for a Church I Don't Belong To: Spirituality without Stereotypes, Religion without Ranting

By Lillian Daniel
FaithWords, 208 pp., \$22.00

Lillian Daniel believes that the church would be better off if we were to proclaim and enact the good news of God's generosity rather than continually apologize for the harm other Christians have done throughout history. When we approach evangelism from an apologetic stance, we diminish the value both of our conversation partner and of our community of faith. We elevate inter-Christian differences above God's grace, obscuring the beauty of the gospel. Daniel's breakdown of nones into four categories—No Ways, No Longers, Never Haves, and Not Yets—will be helpful for those who seek to share their experience of God with people beyond their church walls in a nuanced way.

Who Lynched Willie Earle? Preaching to Confront Racism

By William H. Willimon
Abingdon, 152 pp., \$17.99 paperback

William Willimon's book spans multiple genres. It contains the narrative of a racially motivated murder and its aftermath in a South Carolina community in 1947, a close reading of the sermon a white pastor named Hawley Lynn preached following the lynching, a confession of the author's own complicity in racism, a theological discussion of sin and redemption, and a guide to help pastors confront racism through preaching. At the heart of Lynn's sermon was the question "Who?" Which church members took part in the lynching? Who was Willie Earle, the murdered man? How might Christ bind these people together? Willimon helps readers translate these questions into the current context, to probe for and inspire justice.

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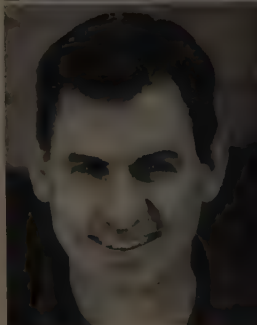
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Why Niebuhr mattered

I once heard Stanley Hauerwas issuing one of his screeds against Reinhold Niebuhr when he was interrupted by a young theologian from England who asked, "So why do you care about Reinhold Niebuhr at all?"

The question was a sign of a theological sea change. For years Niebuhr was a dominant figure in Christian ethics and an unavoidable figure in theological education. It's long been a theological parlor game to ask: Where have public theologians like Reinhold Niebuhr gone?

Martin Doblmeier's terrific new doc-

umentary on Niebuhr, *An American Conscience*, reminds us just how essential Reinhold Niebuhr was. Among the luminaries who pay homage to Niebuhr are former president Jimmy Carter, *New York Times* columnist David Brooks, and historian Andrew Bacevich, a critic of the recent American military adventures. Doblmeier brings in footage showing President Lyndon Johnson awarding Niebuhr the Presidential Medal of Freedom.

Martin Luther King Jr. quoted Niebuhr in his "Letter from Birmingham Jail," and in the film Cornel West talks about how King read Niebuhr in graduate school and concluded that African Americans had the resources to launch a movement of resistance to segregation. The film describes how Alcoholics Anonymous adopted Niebuhr's Serenity Prayer. His daughter, Elisabeth Sifton, says Niebuhr was slightly embarrassed to be famous for writing a prayer. The film also narrates his epic friendship with Abraham Joshua Heschel, who delivered the eulogy at Niebuhr's funeral, and includes a moving tribute from Heschel's daughter Susannah. Barack Obama, it is pointed out, was a Niebuhrian realist of sorts.

The film crackles with energy. Like his previous film on Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Doblmeier does a good job showing the arc of a life.

To some extent, Niebuhr was a "yahoo from Missouri," as his daughter recalls. He was a first-generation American and, in a detail Doblmeier does not belabor, a native German speaker. He needed an assistant at Eden Seminary to help him with English, yet graduated as valedictorian. His father, Gustav, was his delight and role model, which was not the case for his brother Helmut Richard, who found their father authoritarian. Sifton



PUBLIC THEOLOGIAN: A documentary on Reinhold Niebuhr debuts on PBS in April.

weighs in on the difference between the brothers and notes that Reinhold himself thought his brother was the better thinker. "I have the gift of gab," she records her father saying of her uncle, "but Helmut is the better theologian." The differences between them came up in their only public feud: when Japan invaded Manchuria H. Richard wrote a famous essay on "The Grace of Doing Nothing." Reinhold found it dangerously naive.

Reinhold began pastoral ministry in Detroit, where he penned my favorite book of his, not mentioned in the film, *Leaves from the Notebook of a Tamed Cynic*. He tried to awaken corporate executives, bankers, and other eminences in his congregation to the social ills of racism and worker exploitation. He mused for the rest of his life on the way people can be good as individuals but corrupt when acting as a group. He came to describe that intuition using the symbol of original sin. When he left Detroit for Union Theological Seminary in New York, African-American churches held services of appreciation.

At Union, I was surprised to learn, he was not universally well received. Though seminary president Henry Sloane Coffin had been impressed by his activism and his writing in places like the *CHRISTIAN CENTURY*, the rest of the faculty was aghast at his having no doc-

The author is Jason Byassee, who teaches at Van couver School of Theology.

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torate and nearly voted not to appoint him. Soon they realized they might have to struggle to keep him. His classes filled to overflowing. He taught Bonhoeffer and helped convince faculty colleagues, in the midst of the Great Depression, to take a pay cut to bring Paul Tillich from Germany.

As the cold war gained steam, Niebuhr thundered at the Manichaeism that viewed the Soviet Union as altogether evil and the United States as altogether good. J. Edgar Hoover's file on him eventually ran to 600 pages.

Niebuhr spent a career writing "big books on big subjects with big public stands," as Brooks said. Sifton tells of the way her father could write fast, amidst chaos. And could he ever turn a phrase: "Nothing that is worth doing can be achieved in our lifetime; therefore we must be saved by hope. Nothing which is true or beautiful or good makes complete sense in any immediate context of history; therefore we must be saved by faith."

Niebuhr is still read, and West describes *Moral Man and Immoral Society* as still the most important book in Christian ethics. But Niebuhr's historical moment seems to have passed.

Hauerwas argues that Niebuhr could assume one thing we cannot—the presence and influence of a strong mainline church. Perhaps that explains why the church is largely absent in Niebuhr's theology (though it is lovingly described in *Leaves*). Furthermore, Niebuhr's own use of Christian tradition relied heavily on using Christian terms—like *sin*, *hope*, *love*, and *forgiveness*—but applying them in ways that seemed to leave the particulars of Christian doctrine behind. That's why a group like Atheists for Niebuhr could exist.

Are there heirs to Niebuhr? If there are, would they be figures like Jerry Falwell or Franklin Graham, who speak as though America were the church? Jim Wallis? Marilynne Robinson? Might Trump adviser Steve Bannon, in a peculiar way, be a kind of Niebuhrian figure, whispering in the ear of the president and providing his own theological vision about how to use power?

The return of Reinhold Niebuhr may not be all we need. But it would help.

Christian hope in *Hamilton*

Hamilton, the musical that has been selling out on Broadway since 2015, finally came to Chicago. I admit it—I'm not used to waiting for my entertainment. When I can stream any entertainment at any time, day or night, the inaccessibility of this hugely popular show is a not entirely welcome phenomenon. When tickets finally went on sale, I bought mine right away.

As *Hamilton*'s many fans know, the show deploys people of color to portray white characters from American history, such as George Washington and Thomas Jefferson. The musical is infused with rap and hip-hop—musical forms created by people of color. The America of playwright Lin-Manuel Miranda's show is a land of opportunity where anyone can grow up to be "a hero and a scholar"—even a "bastard, orphan, son of a whore and a / Scotsman, dropped in the middle of a forgotten / Spot in the Caribbean by providence, impoverished, in squalor." This is the America where immigrants "get the job done," where determined and talented individuals pull themselves up and change history.

Hamilton keeps this American orthodoxy intact even as it proceeds to poke holes in it. The show gently but persistently refuses to drop women and slaves out of American history, instead representing their challenges honestly and reinterpreting traditional understandings. A charming video on YouTube shows Miranda performing an early version of *Hamilton*'s opening song at the Obama White House. He tells that the audience that he's writing about Alexander Hamilton, a person who "embodied hip-hop." His audience laughs at the incongruity, but the success of the musical is due to the power of what he envisioned.

On the day I attended *Hamilton*, the audience appeared to know every lyric. Like me, the young woman at my side had an obstructed view. Yet she kept saying, "I can't believe we're at *Hamilton*!"

in a tone conveying access to divine mystery. When Hamilton, Aaron Burr, King George, and Thomas Jefferson came on stage, the audience greeted each one with a delighted murmur of familiarity, and when King George sang that he would "kill your friends and family" to remind us "of his love," the audience sang along.

All of this audience participation helps *Hamilton* succeed as live art, as a communal experience, because of its fine craftsmanship, and because it touches on the audience's deeply held beliefs. I could not help but think of liturgy—the "work of the people"—that turns doctrine into a living, breathing reality.

Hamilton's final line is a repeated and haunting, "Who lives, who dies, who tells your story?" Though on its face the story is Alexander Hamilton's, the combination of staging, lyrics, casting, and musical form makes for a story that's much bigger. It's the story of Eliza Hamilton and the story of the slaves who are the subtext of the lyrics. It's the story of a diverse cast and of a diverse audience. It's a hope for a new American orthodoxy. While Christian hope can never rest in any American orthodoxy, *Hamilton* may inform how we Christians perform liturgy together in an effort to draw closer to the truth that is in God.



PLAYWRIGHT: Creator and star of the original Broadway cast of *Hamilton*, Lin-Manuel Miranda wrestles history off the page and onto the live stage.

The author is Beth Felker Jones, who is a professor of theology at Wheaton College in Illinois.

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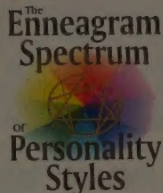
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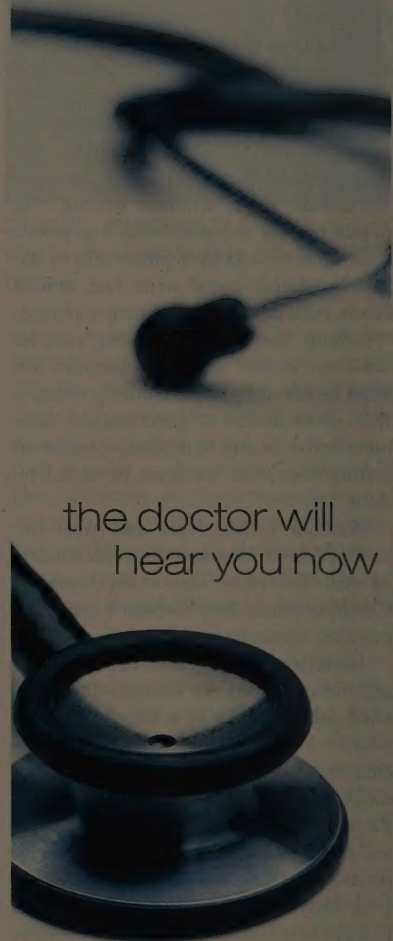
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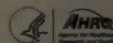




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The Supper at Emmaus, by Jacopo Pontormo (1494-1557)

In his 1525 depiction of the Supper at Emmaus, the Late Italian Renaissance painter Jacopo Pontormo portrays the moment that Christ blesses the bread. The Lukan narrative tells how the resurrected Christ makes himself known to his followers through the breaking of bread in the obscure locale of Emmaus (24:13-35). Pontormo selects the moment before that revelation. One disciple gazes at Christ blessing the loaf, while the other concentrates on pouring red wine. Christ stares at the viewer, as do the onlookers behind him, the contemporary Carthusians of the Certosa del Galluzzo outside Florence for whom the picture was painted. There is not yet recognition by the disciples. In typical Pontormo fashion, the figures are pushed to the foreground, and realistic details are visible, such as the naked feet of the disciples, heads of cats, and a puppy in the lower left corner. The eye of God watches over the event.

Art selection and commentary by Heidi J. Hornik, who teaches in the art department at Baylor University, and Mikeal C. Parsons, who teaches in the school's religion department.

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